

◇ Defenestration ◇

Volume I, Issue VIII

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Two Poems
by
Andrew T. Duncan

A Haiku

I believe in words
They are very expressive
Wow, I mean it, wow

The Incredible Hulk is an Incredible Pussy

When I get angry
I just smash a bunch of shit
Without turning green

Genius
by
M.J. Tenerelli

My husband is a drunken sot
Who fancies he's a genius.
He thinks he writes like Hemingway;
It helps to grow his penis.

Braces
by
Stephanie Nordstrom

popcorn
kernel stuck wedged
behind my left molar
I ate it now, but ate it first
Last week.

Rants From An IT Professional (Wannabe)

by
Mark Kettlekamp

What kind of fucking idiots do they take us for?

For all of you who use the Internet, which I assume you do if you're reading this, since the only copy of this rant exists online (and my hard drive. But lets not get into semantics), I'm sure you've seen those "Click on the <insert object here> to win!!!" ads. Now when I first noticed them, it was general pop trivia, that anyone could get, such as "Pick which "Friend" is Ross and win!" and "Pick which "Simpsons" Character is Maggie!" Lately though, I've seen a massive decline in quality of these ads... not that there was any to begin with.

Take for instance today's ad promising me wealth beyond my imagination (a \$50 gift card...) **if** I answered a question asking which animal had four legs. Yes that's right, a question based on your visual ability, which if you are using the Internet, means you've got a damn good chance. I smell a scam!

A good example of how NOT to use the clip-art that came with your Windows 95

Well of course I clicked on the dolphin, and wouldn't you know it? I was a winner! Immediately (ah... the joys of a T-1 connection) I was taken to another site where I was told "Congratulations!" (funny... I don't remember joining any online self-esteem camp), to choose 1 of 6 gift cards. And also to enter in my e-mail address in between the waving smiley faces and under the flashing "hurry while supplies last".

After recovering from the shock of actually winning something, combined with the seizure induced by the flashing "hurry while supplies last" sign, I entered in my e-mail address (so they can send me future offers, and proceed to fill up my in-box with crap I don't want), notamoron@yousuck.com. After entering in my "address", I was taken to another page where I had to choose which company's services I wanted to sign up with. This of course was accompanied by another flashing "hurry while supplies last" message (seizures are fun!).

Yes that's right, the card is only free when you sign up with a company, who will then proceed to financially ass-rape you. Hardly worth the \$50 if you ask me, but still I click on one and am taken to that company's website to fork over my soul.

It all starts with a little window

After all this, a little window pops up saying:

1. You are now being sent to the <company you choose to make your life miserable>. To complete this offer and get your free gift card, you must join and become a paying member to the <company you choose to make your life miserable>. Offer only available to new <company you choose to make your life miserable> customers!

2. Once our offer partner reports to us that you successfully completed this offer, your account will be updated accordingly for your free \$50 Gift Card. Please allow 6-8 weeks for your account to be updated.

3. If you have any questions regarding your free Gift Card, please click here for help!

Notice the last sentence of step 2? That's great! In the 6-8 weeks of my newly acquired financial burden, these peons are fumbling around with my \$50 gift card. Another 6-8 weeks, once my account is *ahem* updated, they'll mail the card to me. THEN it'll probably take ANOTHER 6-8 weeks (Oh come on, haven't you watched TV enough to know by now that everything takes 6-8 weeks to arrive by mail, and costs \$5.95 shipping & handling?) for the card to actually reach my place, which, if I start now, would place the cards actual arrival by this summer (Woohoo! 6-8 months for a \$50 gift card... I could collect \$50 worth of pennies in that time).

God, I hope their supplies last for that long!

Billy Bob Smith Likes The Frothy Beer

Granted that maybe the only people who couldn't get these questions correct are the types of people who flip burgers for a living and sort glass, the clever company giving away gift cards has a way around this. You'll notice that it says "Answer the question" not "Answer the question correctly".

Upon further analysis (boredom), I found another one (ok, ok, several...) of these free gift card ads. This time though, it was "pick the martini". While this is a slightly harder question, then say, "Pick which "Friend" is Ross and win!" and/or "Find your own Ass with only Two Hands and win!", it is also one that will leave young Billy Bob Smith forever convinced that "Martini" is another word for a "Mug of Frothy Beer".

Oh I'd love to see him order a "Martini" at his local-hick-watering-hole and then have all of his single-digit IQ buddies beat the crap out of him for being gay.

Always a Winner

Getting back to my "experiment", this time I proceeded to ignore the martini and click on the red colored border. Wouldn't you know it, I won again! So not only do you not need to answer the question, but you don't need to even answer it all.

Which brings me to my next question. Why don't they just make an advertisement that says, "Click here to get a \$50 gift card!?" Why the ruse? Why can't they just be straightforward? Sure they don't have to say, "Click here to get screwed!" (we'll figure that out as we go along), but why not something simple and to the point? It's not free, since you have to spend money in order to obtain it. The "trivia" question is obviously unnecessary. What kind of fucking idiots do they take us for?

Of course I keep forgetting such stupid people do exist, since I tend to surround myself with friends who are either of average intelligence or above.

For instance, the other night I overheard two females, one of which told the other "Did you know a Long Island Iced Tea has more than one kind of alcohol in it?" My guess is that she would have picked "Mug of Frothy Beer" for the Martini question.

Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to see this e-mail about a natural male enhancement pill.

Sod
by
Paul A. Toth

Ralph did not drive into his new driveway. He parked a bicycle in the front yard. Girl's bike. It had a headlight, and when he rode through the neighborhood at night, his troubles and ours were illuminated.

One day, I saw him in the middle of the street throwing a spray paint can at the pavement, shards of lid scattering like dragonflies. Larry -- the asshole who mows his yard every other day -- swept the plastic. Ralph had spraypainted strange symbols on his mailbox, probably copied them from heavy metal records.

Another time, Ralph dug up his grass, leaving piles of dirt. I laughed for a month. I drove relatives and friends by the house just to show them. But then Ralph planted new sod. It looked good. Made me mad. Someone threw chemicals on the lawn. Bet it was Larry. I used to watch Ralph pedal to work. Nancy -- who sniffed the neighborhood for bones of adultery -- followed Ralph, tracking him to Burger King. He was sweeping the parking lot. Bill Finnegan, fast food addict, left a BK crown in Ralph's doorway. Bill takes things too far. Bill orders everything extra-large.

Ralph was on medication. Obviously. We wondered: Lithium, Prozac, Thorazine, which? We wouldn't see him for weeks. But sooner or later he would appear in the driveway with a 40 ounce of Budweiser. Next, we would hear noise. Then the police would come and park in his driveway. After they left, Ralph would disappear inside for a month. Shame, I suppose.

Too bad he never met the neighborhood drunk, Glen Phillips. Whenever hungover, Glen plays country music, especially, "The whole neighborhood knows I'm home drunk again." Yes, we know, but we have no sympathy. His wife Gloria is a wonderful woman, beautiful gal. Annoying lisp but beautiful.

One day we saw smoke at dawn. Most of us -- not Phil -- were on our way to work. We ran to Ralph's driveway and watched the smoke and fire. We watched that house burn for fifteen minutes. When the fire truck arrived, the house was half gone. The fireman said,

"Nobody called?"

We looked at each other. We never thought to call. No one had mentioned it. No one had said anything. The fireman walked back to the truck and with his fellow firefighters brought the hose toward the house. More fire trucks arrived. Sundrops put the fire down. Inside Ralph's bedroom remained the beer bottles and something of a corpse. They say he was unconscious, but if someone had banged on the door or bedroom window, he might have come to.

Now it's Sunday. Larry is mowing his lawn, Nancy is on her cell phone, Bill Finnegan is eating Burger King, Glen Phillips is listening to George Jones, and me, I'm drunk, too. I keep seeing dragonflies everywhere, but when I swat them, they won't fly away. I'm wondering why, but I can barely think with the sound of that goddamn lawnmower. Round and round. Yet I believe in reincarnation. There's a spraypaint can beneath the wings of that dragonfly. We are all about to be graffitied.

Costco High
by
Rob Rosen

If you're on a diet, don't go to Costco stoned.

If you've already eaten lunch, don't go to Costco stoned.

If you don't enjoy freshly prepared frozen foods...well, you get the picture.

However, if none of the above applies to you, by all means, go to Costco stoned out of your ever-lovin' gourd. But be prepared, you never know what might happen...

It all started one sunny, Sunday afternoon. My friend Charlie came over and said that he absolutely had to go to Costco. Seems he was out of his mega-sized bottle of shampoo. I still had plenty left of my own, and it had been nearly a year since I bought it, but said okay nonetheless. Costco is always an adventure. Like traveling to a distant land. America's version of The Kasbah, as I like to put it. So I vigorously nodded my head in agreement with his plan.

"Let's go," I said, reaching for my backpack.

"Okay, but first..." he replied, handing me a crisply rolled joint.

Uh-oh. I knew better than to go shopping stoned. Still, it would have been awfully rude to turn down such a generous offer. Besides, what harm could it do?

"Mmm, okay, thanks," I said and grabbed the joint.

I've never been much of a stoner. Always hated the cottonmouth and the munchies. Not to mention the cost of yet another addiction. But when it's freely and eagerly offered... okay by me, dude... let's toké up!

As usual, it burned. I coughed, giggled, tried again, coughed some more, giggled again and embarrassingly watched as Charlie smoked like a pro. No cough, nor giggle. Only lovely, little rings of gray smoke followed by a deliciously pungent aroma.

Being a lightweight has its distinct advantages, however. Thirty seconds later, I was stoned and we were out the door.

"Pretty day," I said, as we made our way through SoMa, passing the closed offices and pricey warehouse live-work spaces.

"Yeah," he said, bobbing his head up and down.

"Good pot," I added, feeling my head start to tingle.

"Oh yeah." Again with the nod.

Then the tingle started to travel. First to my ears, then down the back of my neck, across my chest and now sensitive nipples, down my tummy, where I heard a distinct gurgle, through my crotch, which throbbed with glee, and all the way down to my slowing-down feet. Every blood vessel and pore of my body felt like they were being raked over the coals. Not that it was an unpleasant feeling, mind you, it was just so all of a sudden, so intense, so...so...

"So what's in this stuff?" I barely was able to mumble to Charlie. "I'm stoned as shit."

"Yeah, should have warned you. Packs a punch. Sorry," he offered.

Too little too late, I thought, but was now unable to verbalize. Oh well, at least it made the drab facades of the passing buildings a little more colorful.

We walked the rest of the way in silence. My lips, and most of my neurons, were now temporarily on the fritz. Still, we had smiles on our faces. Smiles that simply would not fade. Perma-pressed smiles. We looked like a couple of stoned idiots trudging through SoMa. Not that uncommon a sight, I figured.

"Voila," I managed, as we approached the monolith building, single syllable phrases being all I could muster.

"Woohoo," he giggled, "I'm starved."

It wasn't until we grabbed our mega-cart and were well passed the cheap electronics that I realized what he meant by that. But the thought filled my head immediately and I too was now stoner-starved. And, as I was soon to discover, very glad to be at Costco: the stoner's paradise.

Maneuvering the giant cart through the baked goods aisle, we encountered our first free offer of food.

"Jon Donaire ten-inch Chocolate Mousse cake, no preparation, ready to serve, \$10.67, fourteen slices," shouted the lovely and quite ancient lady as she cut said cake into tiny square munchables.

Poor, little, old lady, my warped brain thought. That was probably all the English she knew. Not nearly enough to get her through her harsh life. Still, the cake looked yummy and my tummy was now rumbling, so I grabbed for it and downed it one fell swoop. Charlie was quick to follow. So much for my social conscience.

"Mmm, mmm good," he said.

"You betcha," I replied and then added, "By the way, why do we need this cart if all we're here for is shampoo?"

"Incidentals," he replied, popping another piece of Mousse cake into his mouth as he maneuvered around the throng of freebie-seekers that had amassed around the poor, little, old lady. Well, at least she was popular, I thought to myself, and smiled at her as I grabbed another piece of cake. She was too busy to notice. Sad.

My sadness turned to elation, however, as we crossed the small chasm from baked goods to frozen foods. For there, directly in front of us, were several other mostly elderly ladies with similar sized morsels of free, pre-cooked, and newly thawed foods.

"Delimex 3.5 ounce Chicken and Cheese Quesadillas, grilled white meat chicken slices, mozzarella and cheddar with salsa in flour tortillas, microwaveable," beckoned the not-as-ancient hawker. My stomach was doing back flips.

"Oh my God, these are fabulous," Charlie said, as he devoured the bite sized treat. I nodded my head in agreement and we each put a bag in our cart. Though I'm severely lactose intolerant, \$9.03 seemed like too good a bargain to pass up. Besides, the quesadillas were really amazing. (Yes, so was the pot.)

"Look!" I nearly shouted.

Charlie followed my finger down the frozen food aisle and rested his eyes on a vision of loveliness.

"Kellogg's Homestyle Eggo Waffles, four pounds, \$7.94."

Holy crap! We raced down the aisle, nearly knocking over a family of Middle Easterners that seemed overwhelmed by their surroundings. I doubted they had anything like Costco from wherever they were from. "Welcome to America," I whispered, as we steamrolled by.

We downed the steaming hot waffles in no time flat. They were smothered in Country Classics Pancake Syrup one gallon bottle for \$3.24. They were simply the best waffles I ever ate. Charlie and I greedily grabbed for seconds, but thirds were definitely a no-no. Ming Sue, whose name I read on her badge, put a stop to that right quick.

"Two tastes max," she admonished, shaking her finger at us.

"Thanks," we said to her, opting not for the Kellogg's Homestyle Eggo Waffles, but chose instead the Krusteaz Pancakes 144 count for \$13.28. We flung a bottle of the syrup in the cart as well.

My stomach was screaming up at me by that point, "MORE!"

"Damn I'm thirsty," I said, feeling the burn of the additives in the syrup as they made there way down my dry throat.

"There," shouted Charlie in response.

"Gatorade Wide-Mouth Tropical Fruit Variety Pack, \$13.51 for twenty-four/twenty ounce bottles."

We smashed the cart in front of us out of the way and were guzzling the Gatorade in two seconds flat. The twenty-four bottles fit nicely in our cavernous cart, but still I was ravenous.

Again we made our way back through the frozen food section, adding several incredible deals into our cart. Okay, so it would take me months to eat 16/4 ounce Wampler All White Meat Turkey Burgers patties. At \$11.35, that's only \$0.71 per patty. How could I ever shop

at Safeway again? When would I ever have room in my freezer again, was a better question.

Dry foods next. My stomach lurched in anticipation.

"T.G.I. Friday's Loaded Nachos, 48 count, 1.75 ounce bags, only \$13.84,"

"Out of the way!" we screamed, as we raced with our cart down the aisle.

"Holy mother of God, these are incredible," Charlie said, savoring each tiny chip.

"Who knew?" I added, choosing to down my paper cup's worth in one eager mouthful.

We gladly added several bags to the cart, plus some much-coveted peanut butter, cereal, cans of corn, cans of peas, a case of tuna fish, which we planned on splitting, a canister of Kraft grated dry parmesan cheese for Charlie, two/60.6 ounce bottles of ketchup for me, 2.5 pounds of cashews, a Ghirardelli Double Chocolate Brownie Mix 80 oz box, for when we got home, and enough chili, pasta, rice and assorted soups and seasonings to last well into the next year.

Along the way, we gladly dined on Pacific Sun Gold Peppered Beef Jerky, Nabisco Nilla Wafers, and some incredible Red Baron Deep Dish Pepperoni Pizza. Not too mention, we circled back around the frozen food section and repeated most of our previous stops, except for Ming Sue's station, which we wisely went around. We also filled our cart with frozen bagels and burritos, though I had no earthly idea where in my freezer they would go. Maybe I'd send some home to my family for the holidays. Or maybe to some needy homeless person. They have microwaves, right?

Up and down each aisle we went, sometimes more than once, until...

"Charlie," I said, as we rounded the last food-filled corner, "look at the cart!"

"Uh-oh."

"I think we broke the bank," I said, rubbing my now full and bloated belly.

"I think we broke the fridge," he said, scanning the swelling cart. My measly, little backpack rested ironically on top of the load.

"Let's check out before we have to take a loan out to pay for all this," I suggested.

"Agreed," he agreed.

Now the line.

My head was achingly tired by that time and my legs were starting to give way. The giggling enthusiasm of my original high had given way to sullenness and flat out exhaustion. I didn't think I had the energy to wait behind the dozen other people with similarly filled carts. And judging from the amount of food each of them had shopped for, I guessed we weren't the only stoned marauders in the store. Charlie and I looked at each other and groaned.

Thirty exhausting minutes later, we paid our exorbitant fine and were back outside in the full glare of the day.

"Well, we won't have to do that again for a while," Charlie commented with a lackluster grin.

"Never, never again," I said, heaving my boxes and boxes of food out onto the street as we waited for a taxi. Charlie plopped down on the sidewalk and bowed his head in defeat.

Where oh where was I going to put all this food in my tiny, little studio? My closets and cupboards were already filled to the max. I was seriously thinking about moving in order to make room for it all, but quickly realized I had no more money left. I should have stayed in bed. I should have said no thanks to the joint. I should never have been friends with Charlie in the first place. Or friends with anybody for that matter. Look what it got me: enough chili for the entire state of Texas and enough bagels to open up a bakery.

"Um, uh-oh," Charlie said, looking over to me as I sat there fuming.

"Uh-oh what?" I asked, ill-prepared for the answer.

"We forgot the shampoo."

"Fuck you, Charlie. Fuck you," I responded, sliding my boxes to the curb as the cab pulled up.

Tea and Therapy **by** **Ross Eldridge**

It is my habit, for better or worse, to hurry home from occasions and experiences that are interesting to me and to scribble hand-written notes on the subject and to write up conversations word-for-word. When it is convenient, I type the notes up and keep them as work-papers in my computer. Eventually, the particular event is revisited. For me, this is a kind of therapy.

And so it happens that I have fifteen pages of typewritten notes created from impressions gathered at a November birthday party with about a half-dozen friends of mine, and a subsequent afternoon tea party in December to celebrate a book that one of the same group had had published. This happened in 2002, and the notes have been waiting to see the light of day (and reason) for over a year.

The birthday party will have to wait awhile to be recreated, but the gathering of about twenty friends and acquaintances for a literary tea is about to go down on the printed page. I'll call it "Tea and Therapy" and hope to amuse. We'll meet my friends and a very odd therapist.

If my lay friends are strange, and they really are, it is my experience that one of the strangest people I have ever encountered is a psychiatric therapist. More than a psychiatrist, this gentleman is a psychoanalyst, with, I imagine, a wall covered in diplomas and, I trust, a file full of "Thank You!" letters. My own therapist knows him, and recommends him as a colleague and an amusing personality.

I first met this peculiar fellow at a combined Christmas high tea and book launching. Several of my friends attended the party, and I've known the host - a Bermudian writer who specializes in local history books - since he wrote about the ghost that haunts a home my father lived in for a time. I had not appreciated that my friend, the writer, was in therapy. His guest of honour was his therapist.

When I walked into the rather grand old Bermuda home, I was met by the anxious author of the book being launched (or dedicated, autographed and handed out at least ... no books flew through the air) who warned me that I could not under any circumstances review his book in the newspaper. It was not because of my poor reviewing skills on other occasions; it was simply that the book was a personal effort, not for commercial sale or profit. Rather, a gift to the author's friends and, I think, selected family members. It featured family photographs with captions, the writer was identified and his picture shown on the cover.

"It's about my sexual awakening," whispered the host. "I see. I can imagine you don't want that reviewed!" I tried to create a bit of humour to lighten the atmosphere. Actually, I'm a bit of a smart-arse and I couldn't resist making the remark. "A very limited number of copies and all will be handed out personally," and he pointed to a cardboard box much bigger than a breadbox.

In a large room with an open-beamed ceiling and a blazing fire in the hearth, the author started signing books from the box and passing them along to each of his guests, who were taking tea, finger sandwiches, cake and sweet pastries. The dedication in my copy indicated

that the writer appreciated my "wonderful messages", which the author had detected in my weekly newspaper column. Every adult present, and quite likely the two youngsters, eventually received a copy of the book, autographed and personalized.

It is not my intention to review anyone's sexual awakening here, except to say this one detailed by my friend was loud to the point of having his neighbours at boarding school banging on walls and, apparently, was more than satisfactory for all concerned. As I am a bit hard of hearing, anything at increased volume gets my thumbs up!

Playing at being a therapist, I now sense that the book that I will not review was discussed with, and encouraged by, the author's own therapist. It reads like the revelations you might offer to your professional confidant and close friends, if not all your immediate family. The therapist had been invited to the tea for the wisdom and encouragement given the writer, and I don't think he had the meter running for the hour.

My friend with the tell-nearly-all book must have spent a fair bit of money for his therapeutic publication. It is a beautifully designed and printed hardcover effort. I rather liked the story too. The writer entertained his friends, added to the body of artistic literature in Bermuda, and had some therapy in the bargain, all under the watchful gaze of a psychoanalyst. And what a curious fellow this analyst turned out to be.

I was first introduced to the friend's honoured party guest. A firm handshake, as you'd expect from a medical professional. He had his wife and two teenaged daughters with him. I met them quickly, more handshakes and first names exchanged.

"You are Ross Eldridge?" asked the doctor. "I read your column in The Mid-Ocean News each weekend."

"Don't be put off by that," I replied. "I'm not such a mad or bad person in real life." (I forgot that one should never use the words "mad" and "bad" and "real life" around those in the psychiatric field.)

"But, Ross, you don't look at all like the photograph in the newspaper byline."

It's true, the photograph was many months old and I'd grown my hair longer and had quit wearing my reading glasses.

"It's me, it really is!"

"Is there a copy of this week's Mid-Ocean News here?" asked the doctor. There was. He looked at the newspaper and looked at me, and again at the newspaper. "It really doesn't seem to be you. Are you sure you don't write for another newspaper?"

And I thought to myself: "Here's a conversation to write down tonight!"

After that introduction, I sat on a sofa with my tea (in a cup and saucer that had arrived in Bermuda in a barrel of sawdust or flour on a sailing ship two centuries ago, which made my hand shake to think on) and noticed that the host-author was engaged in loud conversation with the wife of the psychiatrist. I could hear the words quite clearly. She was talking to our host while listening absent-mindedly to a cell phone held to her ear, and looking around at the party guests. That might indicate a broad mind, the kind I lack.

"I say," she said to the author, "did you celebrate Hanukkah this year?"

"Well, no. This is my only party this month. It's for Christmas and, besides, I'm not Jewish."

"I understand. Hanukkah was very early this year."

One of the daughters gasped and asked, quite audibly, "Mummy-Darling, doesn't that mean Christmas will be early this year too?"

"I'm afraid so."

"So early! So early!" The girl looked to be close to tears.

Her sister, however, turned to the analyst, asking, "Daddy, what jewels are you getting us this Christmas?"

"They will have to be rubies or emeralds, of course. It is Christmas after all!"

"I do so adore rubies, Daddy."

"For myself, I'm thinking of getting some star sapphires. One can get so lost in star sapphires. I might even have a diadem made for me." The analyst reached up and posed his fingers like a crown on his head.

I'd met quite a few therapists over the years, but never one like this. Of course, he was not sitting behind a desk, or alongside a couch. It seemed that psychiatrists might be people too. Weird people!

The daughters, who I probably should not lampoon bearing in mind their ages and delicate sensibilities, then seemed to forget about jewelry and precious stones.

"We sat next to two virgins on the flight to Bermuda," one daughter informed us all.

"Yes, one was seventeen and the other twenty-five," chirped her sister.

At this point, I very nearly had to be a nosy reporter. "How," I wondered to myself, "did they know these fellow passengers were virgins?" I restrained myself and figured that they probably simply asked, and were given clear answers to their rather personal questions. "This sort of thing might not be strange in the First Class Cabin on British Airways."

The best part of an hour having passed, the psychiatrist and his family grouped together and prepared to take leave of the party, clutching copies of the book we'd come to see launched. Kisses and thanks were exchanged with the host; they were that kind of guests.

I thought the party would surely grind to a halt. Could a group such as this continue to function without a resident therapist? Yet, there were a few more public offerings and notes for me to take. One guest was trying to convert an elegant young woman to the Animal Rights Cause. Cleverly, he used the description of the person stroking a warm bunny's fur to inform her how such things lower our blood pressure, get us in touch with nature, and benefit us in so many ways.

"Yes," replied the well-dressed woman, "I quite understand that. I have a fifty-two-inch mink coat and I love to stroke it."

[I have the sudden memory of my blue, lucky rabbit's foot that I lost while on holiday at the seaside in England as a little boy. My luck never really recovered from that.]

The Animal Activist immediately looked nauseous and almost speechless, and stuffed some angel-food cake into his mouth hurriedly with his fingers. I know that eating is often a symptom and result of anxiety and distress for some of us. The man was somewhat overweight.

"This needs hot custard! Hot custard!" and then there was a horrified silence from the PETA person.

When it came time for me to leave, my host whispered again the words he had inscribed in my copy of his book.

"I got the inspiration to write my story partly from some things I read in your newspaper column. I feel you are sending me messages. Thank you for the messages!"

The host did not kiss me goodbye. "I am not that kind of guest, or it is not that kind of party," I thought. "But what do I know? I only write a newspaper column, not a tell-nearly-all book."

I'll mention all this to my own therapist.

The Art of Truth
by
Shelley Ontis

I knew the moment she sashayed into my office that nothing would ever be the same again.

It was one of those nights where the sirens and stink of the city rose up off the pavement like upside down rain and you couldn't help but get soaked in it, you'd left your umbrella at the bar and some luckless wino finally had a good moment as he palmed it on his way back out after begging for a bourbon, straight that never came. You know, one of those nights. And then she swayed into my office.

She cocked a hip on the corner of my desk like it was her spot all along and how dare I not keep it dusted and smart for the next time she chose to plant her caboose. She said, "You the detective, or you just keepin' his chair warm?"

She had a smoky voice, a voice that spoke of late nights, hard liquor, harder men and the occasional hard candy. So I says, "Who's askin'?"

"I'm asking," she said, as if that's what I'd meant. She lit a long, thin cigarette. "Need to find somebody. You up for it?"

"Maloney's the name, I'm a gumshoe, a snoop, a private dick. If he's missing, I can find him." She turned to say something soft and wise, but I stopped her. "For a price."

"I expected as much. Good men don't come cheap." She pulled a piece of paper from way down low inside the front of her dress. I took it from her, fighting the urge to hold it against my cheek, or smell it.

"His name, last address, aliases, everything you'll need. And I want him alive." She took a long drag off her cigarette and blew smoke bullet holes above her head.

"You got it all wrong, baby, I'm not a hit man, I'm just a dick. If I find him alive, he'll be alive, see."

"No," she said, as she undulated off the corner of my desk and oozed toward the door, her perfume and smoke trailing behind her like adoring fans following her everywhere she goes, fans that you can kind of see through and that float off the floor and might make you cough, if you got allergies. "You've got it wrong, Maloney. Just remember, I want him alive." She reached up, stroked her long, auburn hair, and then removed it all in one quick motion revealing an envelope taped to her bald head. She tore it off and threw it to me. "Here's half a mil. Twice that when you're done." Then she put the wig back on and swiffered out the door, leaving as if she'd just gotten the best of me, but I knew the truth. She wasn't so smart. She'd put the wig on crooked.

I poured myself a shot of bourbon and decided to take a nap before starting the case. I dreamed of the dame with the crooked wig, and wondered if any other parts were detachable.

The next day, the city still stinking and the sirens still blaring, I hit the pavement looking for

the mark--J.D. Smith. I hit my usual narks, came down hard on a few of 'em, just to get this case done and out of the way, but I didn't know if it was so I could end my business with that feisty dame or so I could see her again, real soon.

One squealer said he'd heard of the guy I was looking for, he liked to play the backroom poker games, bet on back alley dogfights, score high in unfinished basement tiddlywinks. A real sicko.

I finally tracked him down at a skid row flea circus, betting on whether the trapeze artist would bite it or make the triple. I started to get nervous, this was easy, too easy.

"Smith?"

"Ayuh, that's me." He held up a wrinkled dollar bill and shouted at the manager. "I got a buck says the tightrope walker chokes!"

"Smith, finish your dirty bets and then we got something to talk about."

"Sure, Mac, sure, jess gimme a minute."

I waited, and when Smith had blown his wad on an unusually talented troupe of fleas, I took him aside and said, "Somebody's lookin' for ya, and I'm gonna deliver ya, see?"

"Sure, sure ok." He stared at me, waiting for me to show him the way. Too easy. Sweat stung my eyes. I started remembering all the cases that had gone bad, who might still have a grudge.

"You know a dame with a pretty talk, a pretty walk, a pretty convincing wig?"

He scratched his thick head with a meaty paw. "She smoke long, thin cigarettes and blow bullet holes in the smoke?"

I nodded.

"That sounds like Syd, but she don't wear no wig."

"Sure she don't, Bud. Why don't you come with me and we'll discuss it in my office."

He came like a puppy afraid to pull on its chain, afraid its owner'll kick it and leave it out in the rain with only a can of food and no can opener. Or a can opener, too, it wouldn't really matter, would it?

This case wasn't adding up. Syd, if that was her real name, acted like he'd be hard to control with all her 'I want him alive' talk. But he was like a puppy, afraid to pull on its chain, and all that, and then some.

We walked down the street together, his almost clumsy bulk next to my street-hardened body, one clodding along, one walking straight and sure like the wind was at his back and a home-cooked meal might be at the end of this and every street, and the big oaf kept stepping on my feet and spraying me when talked. He was in front of me, too, which made it even more frustrating, but every few steps he'd crunch my toes and mumble, "So sorry," and I'd be stuck hopping on one foot and wiping my face with my sleeve.

And he babbled about everything he saw. It was a running commentary on everything I couldn't have cared less about.

"Say, Mac, can we stop and get a hot dog, I like hot dogs, only I don't want no mustard or no ketchup, oh sorry, just a few onions and some relish maybe, how often do you think they clean those carts anyway, do you supposed hot dogs are really made a dogs, I wonder if they are if they're made of big dogs or little dogs, so sorry about that, I once saw a coat that was made of dog hair or at least the guy wearing it said it was but I'm starting to think he might have been just yanking my, oops my clumsy feet, I saw a guy wearing a chain for a necklace once and I asked him where the lock was and who had the key and do you know, sorry, he punched me right in the yap, and you say Syd wears a wig but she didn't when I knowed her, but I don't think some of her other parts was real, hey I'll bet you two dollars she wears a push up bra, sorry about that, are those expensive shoes because my toes get squished in these--"

I shot him right between the eyes.

I ran, making my way through the few brave men who tried to stop me and make citizens arrests and impress their dames and mommas and maybe make the papers and have a moment in the sun, but I ran back to my office wondering if anyone could identify me and in walked Syd, this time wearing a zoot suit, a short black wig and smoking a long, brown cigar.

"You tricked me," I railed. "Why didn't you tell me he was an idiot?"

"He stayed with me a while, a favor for a friend. Mixed up my shampoo with some snake oil he'd won in a Parcheesi game. Nothing grows up top since." Syd sat back in a chair and propped her black and white shoes up on my desk. She'd stepped in gum and something no one would want to chew on, but I didn't tell her. Damn her for tricking me. Let her shoes stick to the floor.

"So that was the plan all along. You didn't want to find him. You wanted revenge." I almost admired her smarts.

"No one can take that for long. And you look like a man with a hair trigger. But don't worry, Maloney. You can keep the half mil. I got plenty, and you deserve something for your trouble."

I stood so fast the chair blew out behind me and crashed out the window. I heard someone scream but I didn't care, I couldn't take that smoky voice anymore, I had to have her or get that sultry voice out of my life forever. I rounded the desk like a wildebeest on the prowl.

She stood as I reached her and wrapped my arms around her. I bent her back and kissed her, her wig floating to the floor, the business end of her cigar just missing my good eye.

"Oh, Maloney."

I looked at the ceiling. "Why, of all the detective's offices in all the world did this dame have to waltz into mine?"

"Your name was first in the Yellow Pages. A typo: Baloney, Private Eye."

I remembered the near-sighted, hard of hearing clerk that had taken my ad, and thought what a funny thing fate was, funny like a blue joke you're told and you don't get until three days later when you're soaking in the bathtub wondering if anyone suspects you use bubble bath and a loofah and how much you'd have to pay if they found out. Funny that way.

"You're some dame, dame," I said. "Let's blow this joint. The coppers will be on my tail any minute, looking for the man who shot Smith and left him laying in the stinking street, see."

"Okay, Maloney, let's go," she breathed.

"One thing, Syd." Her bald dome was blinding me under the hard lights so I tossed her the black wig that looked too much like something on the side of the road and watched her arrange it on her head. I looked her suit up and down, pointed my chin in her direction. "I think I like a dress better."

"Oh, Maloney. How lucky for you. You'll need one to get out of the country."

I followed the feisty broad toward the rest of my life, leaving this stinking city behind me, all the Smiths, all the coppers, all the sirens and locks and guns. Turns out she likes bubble baths and loofahs and men who have deep thoughts in deep bathtubs, and I found I don't mind the feel of chiffon against my skin, even if I'm the one wearing it while I'm on the lam.

We got far away with all her money. The biggest mystery to be solved here is who's pouring the next drink, how do you say 'I'm sorry, I didn't know you were a prostitute,' and how did I end up naked on top of the hut?

Maybe for you the city doesn't stink like dirty underwear in the overflowing hamper of life, maybe it's more like day old socks, not worn for sport or heavy activity, or a shirt worn during breakfast, but not lunch and dinner while eating spaghetti or soup or something equally messy. Maybe it even smells good to ya. Well, you can keep the city. I'll take Syd in paradise any day.

And if they ask you what you know about a clumsy, lisping man called Smith they found dead on a city street some years ago, you tell 'em the last person he was seen with was a sweaty-faced, limping man called M.J. Baloney and you won't exactly be lying.

Zen and the Art of House Painting

by
Wayne Scheer

Part I: Introducing Dade Smith

"Will you teach me to paint a house?" I asked Dade Smith.

"Exterior or interior?"

I was young. All was possible. "Both," I said.

He fixed his eyes on mine, staring so intently I felt the urge to clothe my soul. Dade was tall and thin, even scrawny, in that Don't-Let-Your-Sons-Grow-Up-to-Be-Cowboys way. He wore pointed boots and tight jeans, a black T-shirt spackled with white and light blue paint, and a cap that advertised K-Mart. To the uninitiated, he was a thirty-something who never outgrew his adolescence. To me, he was a mentor, a teacher, a guide.

"So you want to paint a house, huh? Why?"

I wasn't prepared for such a provocative question. "I just do, I guess."

My mentor laughed through his nose, his nostrils twitching, while his expression remained as if etched in stone. His dark eyes continued their unnatural stare.

"Why do you look at me so?" I asked.

"I just do, I guess."

I knew I had much to learn.

Part II: The Lesson Begins

"Well," he said. "You got your paint and your brushes. You dip your brush in the paint and you're ready to go."

"Oh," I said. The chill of enlightenment flushed through my system. I put on a jacket.

He handed me a clean brush and a bucket of white paint. We were standing outside his ex brother-in-law's house in Sarcoxie, Missouri. He had been divorced for years, but Dade kept in touch with the ex brother-in-law. "You never know who's gonna give you work."

I made note of my mentor's practical wisdom. For with the truly gifted, there is no divide between the mystical and the pragmatic. All is one; one is all; all is all. But one is never just one.

He pointed to the garage, a slap dash structure of peeling plywood and cinder block. "Why don't you start here?"

I approached the garage with trepidation, my heart pounding to an ancient, primeval rhythm. My journey as a house painter was about to begin.

"Not so fast," Dade said. "Scrape off the loose stuff first."

Part III: Laying a Foundation

"Scrape off the loose stuff first."

Part IV: Learning a Lesson

Wanting, nay, needing to impress my mentor I spent most of the next four hours laboring under the cruel Missouri sun scraping flecks of yellowing paint from the garage. My arm ached and my knees called out in pain from climbing the ladder to scrape under the eaves and from deep-knee bending to get the paint along the bottom of the garage. Even my toes ached. As tired as I was, I felt invigorated by the metaphor I was experiencing first hand about the importance of preparation.

"What the hell?" my mentor shouted as he inspected my work. "Are you still scraping? I finished two bedrooms and a bathroom already."

Impressed as I was with his speed, I tried to explain my own slow, deliberate approach.

"Look. You do too good a job, we don't get to paint the house again in a couple years."

Once again, my guide's practical wisdom taught me an important life lesson: It takes too much time to do a job well.

"Break for lunch," he said. "When you get back, paint the hell out of this sonovabitch."

Part V: Applying Paint

"The painting of a garage begins with a single stroke," I said, proud of my wit. Again, I was humbled by the quick retort of my mentor.

"Whatever." He shrugged his shoulders. "Just start painting."

Feeling like Shakespeare dipping his quill into an inkwell as he began his Hamlet, I gently inserted the brush into the can of white paint marveling that such innocence can withstand the elements. Dade, unimpressed, focused on the core of the undertaking.

"Paint already, for crying out loud."

And so I did. Touching my brush to the wall I instantly sensed the joy of creation as the weathered garage transformed into a gleaming white sanctuary for a Chevrolet.

Before returning to his own work inside the house, I had a question for my guide.

"Which way should I paint?" I asked. "Up and down or side to side?"

"I don't give a rat's ass! Just be finished in a couple of hours."

I took that to mean it was up to me to find my own way within the parameters of the universe.

Part VI: Watching Paint Dry

Although I would prefer to have spent an eternity caressing the walls with my gentle yet firm stroke, lovingly and adoringly watching the paint dry slowly and magically, I was on a deadline so I rushed the job. To my chagrin, the paint dried unevenly and the old paint began stubbornly showing through where I had applied the paint too thin. I was brokenhearted. I fought back bitter tears of disappointment.

"No problem," my mentor said reassuringly. "You'll just throw on another coat tomorrow."

Another important life lesson: You can always cover up your mistakes.

Part VII: Concluding the Lesson

The day was long, my body ached, but my soul longed to absorb the day's lesson. So we headed to Murphy's for beer. It was there that I learned the essence of the house painter by asking one more question.

"When we began, you asked me why I want to paint houses. May I be so bold as to ask that question of you?"

"I like the smell of paint fumes" was his enigmatic but elegant reply.

A Comic
by
Jerry Rychlo



The Bush Painting
by
R. Hutcheson (Painting)
and
Luigi Fairbanks (Text)



This month we present a painting charged with political implications, created by Mr. R. Hutcheson. I forced the newsletter robot to contact Mr. Hutcheson and have him come down to my office at *Defenestration* Central HQ, where I interviewed him over coffee and apple fritters.

Luigi: Thanks for taking the time to speak with me today.

Hutcheson: Oh, the pleasure's all mine. Sorry about being late. They didn't tell me that your "office" was actually one of the dumpsters behind the building. I spent over an hour

wandering around looking for the "Fairbanks" cubicle until a monkey in a derby pointed me in the right direction.

Luigi: Well, it's a common mistake. They move me around a lot. Last week they put me in the space between the water cooler and Genevieve's desk. Anyway, your painting. Can you tell me why you painted it?

Hutcheson: It was a special art project online. I put the picture on my website, and sent a link to it all over the web. With a lot of work on my part, I got 8,500 people to look at the painting in 10 days.

Luigi: You should share your promotional success with Eileen upstairs. She worked her ass off for weeks trying to promote us, and 10,000 e-mails and 43 "favors" later, we had 10 hits.

Hutcheson: I'm more attractive than Eileen. At least I assume that's the case, after what you just told me.

Luigi: Shhh. She has spies. Trash spies. Remember the Trash Heap from Fraggle Rock? Her spies are like that, only smellier. But back to your painting. Did it show up anywhere else?

Hutcheson: Well, I was feeling proud of myself when later on the 10th day I found out that KCAL 9 news in Los Angeles was going to feature a wall full of my paintings on the 10 O' Clock News that evening, as part of a story on the gallery. The paintings looked really cool on TV. It actually ended up that over 3.5 million people probably viewed my paintings on television in less than one minute.

Luigi: And after you appear in *Defenestration*, that'll be like, 20 more people viewing it!

Hutcheson: Exactly. Which is why my next project will be to scam my way onto TV again with my paintings.

Luigi: You could always rob a bank, wearing your paintings!

Hutcheson: Uhh....

Luigi: Or block traffic, using your paintings as the road block!

Hutcheson: What? No!

Luigi: How did you get President Bush to sit still long enough to paint him? Did you have to tie him to a chair or something? Personally I would have stapled his clothes to the wall, with him in them, and painted like that.

Hutcheson: Are you an idiot? I painted it from memory!

Luigi: If I painted him from memory, it would look like a chimpanzee.

Hutcheson: I don't think you're really a professional interviewer. I think I'd like to go.

Luigi: Well, could you leave me with a cool quote before you flee in terror?

Hutcheson: Uhh... "My art is like a pretty little girl who smiles at you, and when you smile back and bend down to talk to her, she kicks you in the shins."

Luigi: Great! Don't forget your coat!

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>

M.J. Tenerelli, known around town, as "The Widder (or Widow) T." lives a secluded life in the house she once shared with her husband; a man who died in a mysterious driveway fire. Ms. Tenerelli, at the time, attributed her husband's untimely demise to spontaneous combustion. All poems written before the accident containing images of her husband on fire in no way foreshadowed the unfortunate front yard blaze.

We recently discovered that **Stephanie Nordstrom** is not, in fact, the heiress to the fortune associated with the Nordstrom chain of stores. Which means the gift certificates she bribed us with mean absolutely nothing.

Mark Kettlekamp resides in living quarters somewhere relatively livable. He is the most naturally enhanced male ever to walk the face of the planet.

Paul A. Toth lives in Michigan. His novel *Fizz* is available from Bleak House Books. Toth's short fiction has appeared in *The Barcelona Review*, *Iowa Review Web*, *Mississippi Review Online* and many others. His short fiction has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best American Mystery Stories. He will receive honorable mention in the forthcoming Year's Best Fantasy & Horror 2003, ed. Ellen Datlow. See www.netpt.tv for information on ordering *Fizz*, complete credits, audio stories and more.

Rob Rosen lives, loves, and works in San Francisco. He would like to say, "Just say no to drugs". He would like to, but he won't. His first novel, "Sparkle", was published in 2001 to critical acclaim. Feel free to visit him at his website www.therobrosen.com or email him at robrosen@therobrosen.com.

Ross Eldridge, a UK Citizen living in Bermuda, was a trainee bartender at "The Wheatsheaf Inn" in Ludlow, Shropshire, for a week in 1968. It went downhill from there: reinsurance, supermarket accounting, therapy, travel, passport photography, therapy, a newspaper column, therapy. Ross wants to write comedy, having 1001 funny experiences that his therapist refuses to hear. Before he gets too old to enjoy it, Ross wants to sleep on the floor of the Natural History Museum in London, below the blue whale. He has written about this craving. Help make it possible! Ross can be contacted at REwriter@northrock.bm Shelley lives in Illinois surrounded by corn, cows and pick-up trucks. She insists it's not nearly as exciting as it sounds.

While waiting to be inducted into baseball's Hall of Fame, **Wayne Scheer** is training his pet turtle to hiss at the mention of Spinoza, Kierkegaard and Dick Cheney. So far, only Cheney causes the appropriate visceral reaction.

With all insanity in the world today, isn't it refreshing that... somewhere in a basement, there is a guy working feverishly; beads of sweat pouring from his fevered, twisted brow... his mind a twisted, writhing, wretched organism whose sole function is to produce from whatever bits of emotional carnage his tortured synapses can convey... a humourous slice of life. **Jerry Rychlo** hopes you enjoy this cartoon.

R. Hutcheson was born on a circus train somewhere in the Midwest. His mother trained the big cats, and his father was a chimney sweep and circus roustabout. An accident at their family compound led to the formation of their infamous Black Tiger Act, in which a 5 year old R. would enter a cage filled with 12 Black Tigers. While the crowd screamed in terror, R. Hutcheson would wash them down with soap and water to reveal them as regular tigers. His website: www.rhutcheson.com

Luigi Fairbanks can currently be contacted at 1 Defenestration Plaza, The Crawlspace Under The Water Heating System.