Obstinate Midgets
Other Titles by Richard Martin

Boink!

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Richard Martin

Obstinate Midgets

Obscure Publications
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Those Who Were Dead Did Not Respond

Like her cat, Alice enjoyed stretching out on rugs in front of windows brimmed with warm and brilliant sunlight. And like her cat, Alice followed the sun from room to room as it made its way from the back, eastside, upstairs bedrooms of her house to the dining and living rooms on the first floor, westside, of the house. For Alice and her cat, the venerable Mr. Bo Gee, the sun-worship and outright dozing began in the middle of March and carried through to the somber and hopeless days of November. Though Alice was a novice -- actually, in her first season of window beach -- while the venerable Mr. Bo Gee was a wily veteran of the rays and had figured out how to dig them for most of his existence, even upping the time spent prostrate before them, after the days of chipmunk and dog fur had passed. Alice had mocked him at times -- back in the day of her vim and vinegar -- saying provocative stuff like:

“Mr. Bo Gee, you have the right size brain.”

With his repartee in the neighborhood of:

“Drop dead, Alice. Big brains suck.”

Of course, unlike her cat, Alice was dead, and even though she didn’t think so, she’d argue with anyone about her supposed condition, citing evidence in the nature of: “If I’m dead or even a card-carrying member of the Walking Dead, how does anyone explain my continued employment at the Retirement Board?”

True enough, that was a tough one to explain, and especially tough for her supervisor, Constance Bilwreck, to get a handle of articulation on. For even though Alice was dead, she managed to come to work each day and maintain her position as a surly receptionist to the herd of future retirees who filed, flittered, and filtered into the Board office each day to finally call it quits with whatever city job or post they held.

Because she was dead, Alice was clever enough not to waste words on anyone, not supervisor Constance Bilwreck or her co-
workers, and least of all the faithful folk who had managed the potholes or the children of the city for the overall good of the god-forsaken polis. Though not quite a manikin – because since when (says who) is a manikin surly – Alice was in fact quite rigid. But rigid like her cat, the venerable Mr. Bo Gee, who, after a luxurious, somewhat erotic sun-stretch, opted for a more sphinx-like posture while still caught in the sun’s mighty blaze. For Alice, the pose was less sphinx-like and more like a chicken prepped and ready for the roasting pan. In fact, she had dubbed the pose, chicken-sittin’, and ruminated that the cat’s choice of this posture somehow enabled him to preserve the heat for a longer period of time than if he had simply maintained a glorious stretch during his ritual to Apollo.

Which bring us to Apollo, as the sun (why not), after this terse exchange between Alice and Mr. Bo Gee:

“Isn’t that right, Mr. Bo Gee?” Alice said. “Chicken-sittin’ preserves the heat.”

“Alice, you’re dead,” said Mr. Bo Gee. “Deal with it.”

So if you can pardon (partner) a small detour here to Apollo via Alice’s mind or lack of one during her own sun bathing, you will discover something cool, I guess, about Apollo and maybe Alice, which seems relevant enough to me at least. Or you could froth at the mouth (as another writer [or rather pawn construct of various political, cultural, and economic forces] lapses into a impoverished sense of diligence to readers and their concern [read about it in the papers awhile back]) about the obvious lack of appropriate coherence, or line of thought even, from most writers and their freaking narratives, and i.e., why won’t this damn writer [me as a construct now taking a deep swim in playful signs] close the hole between a damn chicken-sittin’ cat (manikin-like) pose and the adjective, surly, which according to my internet dictionary [provoking its own detour about the Nature of the Net and the great digital divide between Alice’s generation (she’s an old gal) and the cyber kids who seem to think stealing CDs and DVDs from a record store is probably wrong, but can’t, don’t, or won’t see the
ethics of file-sharing as theft in the present cyber milieu (rhymes with glue) in which they've been cast by the inexorable movement of the species into virtual communities] is as follows:

Main Entry: sur·ly ə
Pronunciation: 'sər·li
Function: adjective
Inflected Form(s): sur·li·er; -est
Etymology: alteration of Middle English sirly lordly, imperious, from sir
1 obsolete: ARROGANT, IMPERIOUS
2 : irritably sullen and churlish in mood or manner: CRABBED
3 : menacing or threatening in appearance <surly weather>
synonym see SULLEN
- sur·li·ly ə/ˈsər·li·li/ adverb
- sur·li·ness ə/ˈsər·li·nes/ noun
- surly adverb

OK, then. Alice was surly, manikin-like, and dead, but when she bathed in the sun with the venerable Mr. Bo Gee, and simply allowed the sun to penetrate her, things started to change – especially, things in her mind. Like she didn’t have one. Or if she did, it had escaped from her body to become part of the hum – the Big Hum – the hum of the breeze through cracks in the window – a breeze with its birds and instrumentation of the city, horns and cars for sure, but people also, working in yards or building something, and then on into the hum of earth – each blade of grass and cloud wisp – and from there into the individual and collective songs in the particles of light and waves of light hitting her (good old boy Apollo), with maybe just the slightest apprehension or insight in her bigger and quieter mind (outside/inside, who the hell knows?) that the Sun (let’s hear it for capital S) was in fact a divine being, not necessarily a revolutionary thought (got Greek), but certainly one fun to entertain, especially for Alice, someone who had died,
for a variety of reasons, but who was coming back to life like a sunstroke Lazarus.

"Preposterous!" Constance Bilwreck said, just yesterday, upon noticing that Alice wiggled her fingers while standing in a shaft of light by the water cooler.
I went into the produce store feeling angry and ready for fresh tomatoes. It had been a tough day at the office. Women floated by my desk dropping private notes – defining the olfactory characteristics of the latest perfume evaporating off their smoky bodies – on my head and into my lap, all because of my complete idiocy about chemical presences in the office. Complete idiocy for me took many forms. I could throw a fit on the floor, wiggling like a fish on a dry dock, or simply bang by head on my desk, until the supervisor showed up and foreshadowed a subsequent paragraph (not note) by letting me have it with a fire extinguisher. I had been off deodorant for years and had recently given up mouthwash and washing my boxer shorts in flavored detergents. I would not give into perfume.

Lap 1
Art,
You really piss me off with your antics. I spend considerable time each morning checking my mood against the types of perfumes available. Am I Oriental, floral, or chypre today? Should I dip into musky or aquatic alternatives? It takes time asshole. Giving up mouthwash was a big mistake!
Cindy
P.S. “Chypre” means very sincere in French.

Pedro was busy with the lettuce when I entered the store. Pedro was a nut with lettuce, spraying it with a black garden hose – really wetting it – before turning the hose on any customer who picked on a random impulse in his mind. Customers incensed and dripping wet were often seen
running down the aisles shouting nasty things about Pedro and his love of the Yankees.

Head 1

Art,
You're the smelly one. My father was a "nose" in the perfume industry and passed his keen sense of smell to me. Noses are like composers. Perfumes are like symphonies and enjoy three movements of evaporation from the skin. Yes, I played the honeysuckle overture in your cubicle area today...blasted it. Don't give me any eau de toilette, you little wimp. Industrial strength is my bag.
Babs

Love grew a postmodern wart and entered the fray. There was just enough time to dip a free hand in a bowl of words and describe myself as a character. First, character is not a sequence of genes or bad environmental decisions. I had been married five times and lied like hell about my identity in each one of the sacred unions. Recently, I noticed two things about my character. I have one extremely long hair in the center of my forehead that goes invisible in the presence of a scissors. And there may be a tiny horn ready to pop out from the top of my head.

Lap 2

Art,
Chanel No. 5 rules French, Italian, and United Kingdom women, but not us American babes. I'm wearing "Beautiful" today. I'm floral, green, and woody. Smell me, Art. I want you to smell me.
Anonymous
P.S. Your fits on the floor turn me on.
I know how to make sauce. I once watched my Sicilian ex-father-in-law make it in a big pot of yesterday. There were no mixing metaphors with him. Whole tomatoes were crushed and strained through a metal sieve and fresh Romano cheese was grated right into it. And he had a lot more rules and ingredients than that – like magic garlic cloves (not ‘shrooms) of exactly the same weight in grams, hint of onion, proper beef/pork ratio, and pepperoni tugboats bobbing on top of the sauce and timed by a stopwatch to sink before bubbling. Simmer for hours.

Head 2

Art,
In my boudoir I pout for you. My bosom pouts. On a fingertip of pure index, I place a drop of Eau de Mandarin Peel. I'm yours in fantasy or not.
Gail

Pedro stared at me and let me have it full in the face, without so much as a dirty thumb diverting the hose mouth of harsh water into streams of spray. I fell backwards into the cantaloupes, slipped, and crashed to the floor, entering unconsciousness in a ripe and stained state. For a few minutes, peaches talked the talk of notes and bouquet before the EMS technicians arrived and thumped my brain with oxygen. When I fully recovered, I was sent back to work with enough of a doctor's excuse to increase my reputation into outright ridicule.

Doctor's note
Art K. slipped and fell in Pedro's Produce. There may be a tiny horn ready to pop out from the center of his head.
Dr. Jeff
I have never been able to stay on track. When I was a little guy, they fed me chocolates, high protein shakes, and religion. I didn’t respond like they wanted, so I was sent away to live with an aunt who lived off what she could make by operating a ceramic petting zoo in her front yard. She forced me into mime, and after the llama crumbled into four pieces due to a direct hit by an irate toddler with a Tonka truck, I assumed the role of spitting at patrons.

Aunt’s note
Art never could spit farther than the llama. However, he did drink perfume from a fountain in the local department store when he was around eight years old. The goofball thought that it was water coming out of the fountain. You should have seen his face. What a laugh I had at his expense.
Aunt Martha

I'm sure I live in a city.
Gone

Pete went to the window and noticed that the outside world had disappeared. "Hmmm," Pete said. "That's a strange one." And just to make sure he wasn't dreaming or something, he opened the window and slammed it as hard as he could on a pinky finger.

Pete screamed.

He was right. The street was gone, i.e., the houses (except for his), his old VW bug, the sky, and all those things that compose and make up an outside world.

Dummer.

Pete went to his computer. He played a game of chess, then solitaire. For awhile some crafty aliens had him trapped in a dungeon. He also watched the complete set of Lethal Weapon movies on his computer screen before emailing his friend, Paul.

Dear Paul,

Have you noticed that the outside world has disappeared? Or hasn't it where you live?

Your buddy,

Pete

Without an outside world or the possibility that the outside world had scrammed or vamoosed etc., Pete figured he didn't have to finish his taxes (that time again) or just about anything. So he deleted Fast Tax from his desktop. It seemed reasonable, if the outside world was gone, then the government was probably nowhere to be found or around. Pete decided to watch some favorite reruns of his favorite TV shows on his computer. He loved American Idol, The Price Is Right, and the Classic Sports channel. If he had been on The Price Is Right, instead of Carla from Iowa City, Iowa, he could have won a new Ford Mustang.

"Crap," Pete said, waiting patiently for Paul's response.
In fact, he had almost forgotten (Carla preoccupied) that the outside world had disappeared until Email Voice notified him that he had mail.

It was from Paul.

Dear Pete,

I hadn't noticed but now that you’ve mentioned it, I think it may have disappeared in my area too. Thanks for the tip.

Your buddy,
Paul

That's a tough one, Pete thought. May was the operative word and there was no way to just stroll over or drive to Paul’s to check out the validity of his observation. Pete knew his VW bug was gone and it truly appeared (disappeared) that sidewalks, grass, and pavement were no longer available for the act of visiting someone.

How could Pete verify that Paul’s continued presence in the outside world after such an email? Or perhaps, Pete thought, Paul is no longer here like I’m and/or as I am, but rather has become a member of cyberspace for some practical or unknown reason and is sort of goofing on me for some practical or unknown reason.

“In fact (Pete scratching his head and talking out loud to himself), when was the last time I saw Paul, or for that matter, my girlfriend Shirley?” he said.

Pete searched his memory. It had been years since he had last “literally” seen Paul. Seeing someone, “literally,” was seen as passé, if not gauche, in Pete’s crowd. It just wasn’t necessary any longer, what with all the communication tools on the market.

“My marvelous cell phone,” Pete said, underneath his breath.

It was through the cell that Pete carried on his relationship with Shirley. A nostalgic-fifties-post-industrial age-looker, Shirley sent Pete pictures of herself making blueberry pies (cooling them on a window sill ledge) and offering up a pitcher of martinis with requisite olives for them to imbibe while smoking unfiltered cigarettes. It was kind of a rage, and all of it a technological trick or gift, from Shirley’s brother, Reel. Reel was a former (expelled)
(cause: trying to delete the administration building from his laptop while barhopping in Cambridge) MIT genius who specialized in holographic portraits for friends and family. Pete’s image through the cell was not some archaic representation of a “macho” man or even a more updated image of a health-nut with juiced muscle mass. Nope. Reel let Pete be a fair-skinned lad with red hair, freckles, hawk-nose, big teeth, and the proprietor of a pair of glasses with bottle-thick lenses and black frames.

But at least, Pete was a good talker. Something Shirley dug while making her rounds through the display windows of her own velvet consciousness. Good-talker, Pete, with his raps and diatribes, like this one (abridged):

“Shirley, perhaps we should meet for a drink somewhere. You know just to talk. Like, you know, recently I found this old book in my cellar buried under some inflatable rafts and stuff. A thing called the Essentials of Existentialism. And like somehow, you know, according to the “Essentials” we’re free to choose, make choices that is, like, you know, there aren’t any essences in the make-up of things...especially human things. It’s all just one big void with all kinds of choices to make. Like, you know, which movie to go to or what to have for supper, and ultimately how we get to define the self through flexible, ever-changing definitions of self.” (Saved 12/24/04)

Sure, Shirley loved this banter, occasionally finding an erotic impulse of stray energy in her cell while she listened and conversed with Pete. As for meeting for a drink, that was another question. Her own diary had reinforced her skepticism for doing that.

_I mean an actual rendezvous with Pete_, she wrote. _Suppose he doesn’t exist? Suppose, Reel’s holograph of him was not linked to an actual Pete, but to Reel’s own crazed and demented perception of possibilities with the right software program?_

Pete started to worry big time. _Surely, not Shirley_, he thought, entering “the world” into his search engine.
Cold One

Marshall was a self, and on any given day, there were plenty of them for him to consider and check out, which he did with the passion of a lexicographer on a hunt for new words dancing off the tongues of linguists during Cocktail Hour at the Phoneme Bar & Grill. Consider what Marshall faced when removing a folded sheet of paper – full of selves – from his back pocket, while walking down the street. So many of them, Marshall thought, slipping into a sub-vocalized rant as he railed across the list for options. Listen:

Yep, (if you listened) that was Marshall, whispering selves
like a nutcase on Constitution Avenue (scaring some folks, actually) before pondering, once again, the bizarre omission of self-discovery on his cheat-sheet of “self.” Self-deprecation had made the cut. Why not self-discovery? For self-discovery and self-deprecation were two selves Marshall really knew something about and he considered them to be part of his self, if not actually his total self, which sort of frightened him (i.e., totality).

For example, circa the Sixties, self-discovery came big into Marshall’s incipient understanding of things. It’s not like he took psychedelics or anything, or even any kind of drugs for that matter. Marshall was a square, not a middle class square – the kind the Beats were yapping about. There was no petit bourgeoisie in Marshall’s genes. His dad worked at the local horseracing track, gambled heavily, refused to go to church on Sunday, and threw two-seam fastball balls at Marshall when he wasn’t looking or overly engrossed in his Superman comics. Marshall dug the Man-of-Steel and fantasized about his own leaps over buildings and stuff. His mom was a sweetheart, worried about him, and tried to grow a deeper manhood (beyond capes and speeding bullets) through household tasks. For instance, she encouraged Marshall to paint the family home a bright canary yellow, which he did with some success and self-discovery. The latter of which came when he jumped off the ladder to avoid a nasty sting from a yellow jacket and/or one of its mates. The fact that Marshall was two and half stories up led to the following self-discovery (though self-revelation could pitch hit here, if it was on the list), namely, that Marshall was less than Superman or even Supergirl with a bucket of canary yellow paint and brush in hand when he took the sting avoidance leap off the ladder, and, like the mere mortal he was, would meet the ground head on like all the smart guys – Newton, Galileo, Einstein – knew he would and could explain (Marshall’s SAT scores were a bit too low for him to explain via the history of physics his particular plummet and oh, by the way, please understand the reference to “square” from here on out to mean nothing less than a square peg into a round hole), and that once meeting terra firma (on its own
footing) an ankle or two would turn over (which one of them did),
pretty much in the same way ankles turn over when a basketball
player after a rebound comes down on an opponent’s and/or
teammate’s foot, and ouch, ligament tears, and so it might have been
wiser to take the sting (unless seriously allergic, which Marshall
wasn’t) than drop to the ground like an iron feather and end up,
thanks to gravity, Bubba, in the emergency room and then the cast
room of the local hospital.

True, his mom and a distant aunt witnessed Marshall’s aerial
faux pas, and may have inadvertently giggled when the paint bucket
splashed enough canary yellow paint on the stunned Marshall for
him to resemble – just for a moment – from their angle on the porch
an unknown and undiscovered, possibly extinct, Canary Dodo bird
from a submerged and/or forgotten former (as in Miss America)
exotic island.

For sure the distant aunt said to Marshall’s mom:
“Your son is a nut.”

Now self-deprecation, as the other self for Marshall in his
limited oeuvre of self, pretty much operated as his definition of
himself through various marriages and affairs he suffered through
with women during an undistinguished career as a loser, not lover-
boy, with them.

As he said to his first wife:
“I know I’m no good. That I’m a wimp, not much of a lover,
and a crybaby.”

“I know that you are, too,” his first wife said, rolling up the
window of her Datsun, before backing over his left foot and
disappearing into the horizon in a cloud of dust, acrimony, and pig-
like squeals from Marshall’s bruised and suffering piggies.

As for his second wife, he reserved the following:
“I’m just a bum. I know that I don’t do much around the
house. But that’s because I’m a no-good, a lout, a fool, a dope, an
incompetent lover, a cheese ball, a fake, a creep, a fathead, a cretin,
a dolt, a dork, an imbecile, a knothead, a ninny, a dunce, a
blockhead, a pinhead, a simpleton, a boar, a cad, a clown, a skunk, a
villain, a snake, a loser, a turkey, a numbskull, a nincompoop, an ignoramus, and a jackass.”

“Bingo,” his second wife said, heaving a mop like a javelin into his beer gut before gathering together her motley and deadly household chemicals and toxic substances into a beer cooler, throwing it into the back of her Ford pick-up with her carpenter tools and Victoria Secret catalogs, and roaring over his right foot (imagine a whimsical and toothless smile on her face when his piggies cried), entering her distant horizon in a cloud of dismay and lost time.

As for his affairs and minor indiscretions in and out of the marital clamp, Marshall pretty much rubber-stamped the view of the majority of the women, that he was incapable of a true emotional response and thus damaged goods, and that all the self-discovery in the world would never rectify that.

Pretty harsh, Marshall mumbled to himself, bursting through the doors of the Phoneme Bar & Grill for a cold one.
Menfolk hitched up hisfolk pants a nanosecond before womenfolk hitched up herfolks. Menfolk didn’t know what a freakin’ nanosecond was and didn’t much care, though womenfolk had a nice ass and looked better in hitched up pants than menfolk looked in hisfolk pants any day.

Menfolk said to womenfolk: “Youfolk look mighty fine in them hitched up pants. Ifolk know wefolk just goin’ out to rake leaves and all, but still womenfolk, youfolk look hot.”

Womenfolk said to menfolk: “Raking leaves is not about myfolk fine body displaying itself through myfolk hitched up pants. Besides, myfolk pants have to be hitched up, not in deference to myfolk fine ass, but because I’mfolk surely the menfolk in this sorry ass family.”

Babyfolk giggled at that. Babyfolk knew what a nanosecond was (kind of like Platofolk in Menofolk knew whofolk hefolk was), and though babyfolk knew, babyfolk couldn’t explain it too well (even to layfolk) and opted instead to ignore specialized details about piddling time, and drew, in a black and white spiral notebook, a picture of the sun wearing red shades and smoking dizzy clouds through a blue pipe. The sun also donned a single orange tooth (crooked as the ruts of wisdom), and on a closer inspection of the drawing, onefolk could see that babyfolk had drawn tiny insectfolk crawling up droopy sunrays like storm-weary spouts.

Babyfolk also wrote a fistful of words on this drawing of light, sprinkling them like literary raindrops – hyperbolic ones (the size of mutated Smith Brothers’ cough drops) that signifier and signified the following: STOP GO TRAFFIC LOVE MOMMYFOLK DADDYFOLK.

When menfolk and womenfolk viewed babyfolk’s drawing, theyfolk felt immense pride. Neither menfolk or womenfolk could draw much. Menfolk could draw a large foot, that’s about it. Womenfolk was into abstract cherries and liked the word jubilee,
when associated with misshapen berries, a tad more than shefolk liked menfolk.

Youfolk see readerfolk, menfolk was a big pain in the ass. When it came to hitching up pants and working around the house, everything was such a big deal. Raking leaves, fixing steps, building a new porch, patching the driveway were all somehow connected to traumatic experiences with home repairs menfolk had experienced as childfolk while working with hisfolk dadfolk many years ago. Dadfolk was a perfectionist when it came to home repairs and improvements, but hefolk just lacked the patience to teach menfolk (as childfolk) how to do anything without yelling and screaming like some bansheefolk at menfolk (as childfolk). Menfolk (as childfolk) had dreams of dadfolk hitching up hisfolk pants before commencing to do the necessary dadfolk (as menfolk) jobs around the house. Menfolk’s momfolk didn’t participate in home repairs and by the luck of the draw on love, menfolk had fallen (like lead leaves) head-over-heels in love with womenfolk before realizing that womenfolk knew tons of stuff about home repairs, and when womenfolk hitched up herfolk pants, shefolk meant to accomplish and complete some task without fooling around and/or complaining.

It’s not that womenfolk minded fooling around (and not even getting to the repair jobs) because fooling around with menfolk was damn good fun and had produced babyfolk whomfolk womenfolk loved immensely. But since the arrival of babyfolk, menfolk couldn’t hold up hisfolk end of the bargain in the Fooling-Around-Department, and womenfolk had little tolerance for menfolk’s traumatic stories about sawhorses and ballpeen hammers. And let mefolk be honest here, readerfolk, womenfolk hated the pant hitching up contests menfolk perpetrated on herfolk before even hauling garbage and trash to the curbside. Womenfolk knew menfolk questioned hisfolk manhood and was threatened by the manhood womenfolk possessed in greater abundance than hefolk possessed.

How else could womenfolk understand menfolk’s constant refrain:
"Womenfolk," menfolk said. "Are youfolk aiming to hitch up yourfolk pants again in front of neighborfolk?"

"Youfolk know I'm not menfolk," womenfolk said. "Pant hitching up is all in yourfolk mind."

"Bullshit," menfolk said. "Ifolk can hitch up my pants faster than womenfolk."

"Please, menfolk," womenfolk said. "Enough is enough."

"No it ain't," menfolk said. "Come on, let's see whofolk is faster."
Street Names

It was the start of surrealism on the planet Earth, and John was already ten minutes late for his dental appointment. Actually, it wasn’t the start of surrealism or any other artistic or literary movement per se, but John’s love of sentences was such that earlier in the day the sun had risen like a cherry cold tablet, fizzed, then rocketed across the sky toward the pale image of the moon, lingering like a giant moth, while simultaneously fading like youth into the light called day.

After all, John thought, there are mundane and exceptional things and what could be done about that. So in celebration of both and to guarantee to himself that he understood what a lost of time or a lateness in time meant in a timeless world, John ran the red light at the corner of Yesterday and Today, while thinking briefly of the real street names, as a cop in his blue and white came after him in full siren and whirling lights.

At this point, John broke down into a quandary and a few other words beginning with qu, such as, quack, quixotic, quasi, quatrain, quintessence, quantum, and quiz. For a nanosecond, these Q words appeared as sunflower seeds in the passenger seat of John’s Hummer, and as perplexed as ever in his quandary, John - tinged with dismay at the artful tricks of surrealism, as if by some ill luck he had suddenly found himself in surrealist text of authentic origin, which by no means was his intention – thought they might grow into representations of beauty that would sweep him off his feet and possibly block his vision of the road, which seem to be hurling at and past him at an alarming rate of speed.

*I really need to get my teeth whitened*, John thought, peeking furtively at them in the rear view mirror like a mouse from his house. *It could improve my chances with the ladies, and I think I might feel better about myself.*

Who knew John was feeling lousy? But as a character, he was full of emotion, and the chance of twisting an ankle while stepping
off a curb remains a prevalent possibility in the world of ups and downs.

Just for fun, John – as the cop bellowed through his PA system: PULL OVER, BUDDY, NOW! – scrolled up a few sentences into paragraph 3 and retrieved the word *quixotic* from the short list of Q words for closer inspection and introspection. True, John thought, Don Quixote is not on my reading list, but in regard to this particular day and particular situation has my life turned “quixotic” on me without sanction or my personal approval?

Suppose, I’m just playing with words, he continued to ponder. What if I’m not a character bristling with emotions or even caught in a dance of time between dentist and cop? Does that mean or indicate that I’m caught up in a romance of noble deeds or unreachable ideals (i.e., the startling joy of language freed from practical tasks and utility) without regard to practical consequences?

John scratched his head and brushed the sunflowers from his eyes. He knew it was time to pull over. So he did.
Obstinate Midgets

On the train, Jeff drank cheap wine and gazed at old factories, graffiti, and debris on the wrong side of the tracks across from the brilliant Atlantic.

Some of the drawbridges of time were open and some of them were closed for repairs. For instance, Jeff just couldn’t traipse back into the past and pick-up his present life from say Point A, which now included (this drawbridge under repair) a bit of geometry and a dose of nostalgia for a full head of hair and the etceteras of charm. The sun, meanwhile, escaped its shadows and fell on the blank page of Jeff’s mind like a luminous cloud of forgotten women.

He had been a lover once but now escaped like an escapee into the causal cell phone conversations of those around him and the rumble of the train.

“Yes, I’m on the train, right now.”
“Yes, I’m on the train, right now.”
“Yes, I’m on the train, right now.”

There were obstinate midgets in the world. Not short people, really. Just things, other nouns, which perplexed him, like stale lettuce and yellow broccoli.

Outside the white limo of his dreams (Jeff as reverie), he was required, like a prerequisite to a course in higher mathematics beyond his god-given talents for multiplication and division, to run an imaginary marathon stark naked through a forest of wild ferns and soft whispers.

Of course, he felt tired doing that, and thought his body may have aged and failed to properly take advantage of partially constructed detours (Jeff under a huge oak panting quietly) during the race (Jeff at the local dive bar throwing back tequilas) like self-help books he never finished and afterward had lied to his elders and therapists about. Jeff was OK, but how about them?

Nouns like illness and death. These were obstinate midgets. Yet, the levity he often felt had something to do with them. The
gravitas of laughter one could say. Or as H.H.* found out via Mozart’s shrill laughter: eternity is the time it takes to tell a joke.

Look, it’s not like he could levitate or anything. But once upon a time (reverie, again?), he rose right out of his kitchen chair and knocked his head pretty good on the ceiling to the amusement of his relative tribe, there for turkey day, after the king of his clan farted inappropriately while passing the gravy boat to the heir of the throne.

The hospital took care of the bump on his noodle, but couldn’t explain the levitation. It was a freak event and Jeff, with ice and aspirin, laughed until a house of mirrors broke out in him like a radiantly perfect sunrise.

Gradually, the speed of the trained slowed from forest-faux rumble to suburban knickknack to approach the depot of his getaway. Jeff noted that the couple across the aisle from him, after two Bloody Marys, a gin & tonic, a Pinot Grigio, and a strange, scampi like chicken salad with olive oil Balsamic vinaigrette, had passed out with their mouths open.

Snoring is not a noun.

Freedom is.

The Atlantic had come back into view with its boats, electric power grids, and shimmering future.

* Harry Haller

\[ \textit{The present shines too, Jeff thought. Like a gamma burst from a neutron star, it shines.} \]

Journey is a noun.
Ray's Travels down a Long Sentence

Ray was no Marco Polo or Magellan or Francis Drake or Columbus or Viking dude or hunter and gatherer who wandered across ice fields and through toothpick forests in order to settle down by a steamy river or on the side of a ragged cliff. And he was certainly not an astronaut or moonwalker or some high-tech probe sent into deep space to pick and peck at the red dirt of this or that planet, so scientists huddled in front of computer screens in Houston could hope for and analyze the possibility that one of our sister planets might have one day, long ago, entertained life with all its cultural, physical, emotional, and psychological complexities that even our alien brothers would have scratched their heads over, gone to spas, got their nails (or antennas) done just to relieve the stress of their freaking lives etc. like many of us have to, especially those of us who haven’t established any new trade routes, claimed temperate islands for foreign monarchies, or suddenly got rich on spices, silk, or pasta.

What Ray?
Where is Ray?
Who is Ray?

But Ray was a traveler nevertheless, and for some time – and time was surely one of the important commodities (ingredients?) in all of Ray’s travels, along with patience and toughness and enough Snickers bars to get a fellow by for a couple of days – had been traveling down a long, winding, sometimes coherent, sometimes incoherent sentence about the life of a guy named Harvey who undoubtedly suffered from the narrative shivers, but for some unknown reason to Ray refused to give up talking (writing) about himself and what he had experienced, like just last Tuesday, when the power grid went down in his town and suddenly Harvey (in a few short sentences) – sentences Ray had skipped across like appropriately spaced rocks over a good size stream (foreshadowing) – had described (himself) as a pathetic loser – literally – by having
lost his house and car and available bankroll in Vegas, all in a seemingly endless game of Black Jack, which in turn, turned him for days into a moron drinking nothing but Jack Daniels on the rocks with the predictable side effects of creating his intention and desire to look through binoculars at one-hell-of-a-good-looking-woman in the house on the other side of his fenced in backyard, which a fairly decent and recent compound sentence had revealed (pay attention Ray) was possible because his bedroom lined up with her bathroom after one of Harvey’s hemlock trees took on disease and had to be cut down to create the proper viewing window.

_Not going to happen with the power grid down_, Ray thought, and too bad, too, because he also felt a tad of loneliness over his situation, which he referred to as his Travels, and he could have used and benefited from a strong dose of good-looking woman to shake up his senses and edges which were a bit dulled by the narrative shivers of Harvey with his gambling jones, and the subsequent loss of a bevy of good-lookers, initially attracted to him (full head of hair, no missing teeth), who lost some of their gloss and plastic beauty from screaming at the jerk that he was a jerk, a lout, a dope, and goodbye, goodbye, goodbye as they went out the door, bringing in their wake like a gentle rain the obvious tears in Ray’s eyes, clouding them really (making sentence navigation a real bitch), unlike the sparkle that would have shined in them (quasar-like) if the power grid had not gone down, and Harvey had been able to focus properly on the moment the woman slipped out of her dress into the darling presence ready to enter a shower stall.

Nope, the lights were out and with nothing to do except listen to the buzz of his inebriated brain, Harvey retrieved a flashlight from his desk, his diary, and a pen and began to write (eventually) a long, winding, sometimes coherent, sometimes incoherent sentence, about himself (no shit) and how he suffered from the narrative shivers – a sentence powered by a tiny beam of light so focused and tiny that the sentence itself appeared as a stream, a rivulet, a steady trickle of water into a vast sink, and nothing up ahead of the sentence or before it (really?), not its adjectives or analogies, not its
hesitations and hiccups, could reveal the stream widening into a raging river bent on waterfall – tumultuous, thundering, pounding waterfall – that once reached would plunge into a revised and much calmer river meandering to a white sea, a silent sea of pure space with only an echo – faint, lost in minute molecular transitions and translations – barely audible then, but crying out:

“What the fuck?”
Mayday

Her fat moved and a distant star with a strange number for a friend went dark. That was OK with Irving. He was on his way to the refrigerator for a beer and could no longer remember the time he had flipped off a whale boat into the Atlantic and had been nudged by a right whale into a consciousness that was so cosmic it was comic, or perhaps cosmic without the “s,” (the intention being cosmic, not comic, as in comic consciousness, which could function as an insight into the humor of things [blub, blub] while in a cosmic, not comic, state of consciousness) which is fairly neat to think about, namely, that the mind enjoys a good misspelling every now and then and may even benefit from the absence of a specific letter or syllable when it comes to ideas when fingers find it healthy to beat upon the plastic keys of loneliness, which ain’t it either.

“Help me,” Irving shouted at whale patrons snapping pictures of him, before he disappeared beneath a spew of cold, salty bubbles.

“Help him, indeed,” the whale patrons said to each other, before reassuming their green hotdog looks of distress.

Denise was quite fat and loved the world of advertising. Actually, she was an advertisement freak who spent long Sundays in front of no TV clipping coupons for trips to the Yucatan and Botox needles to paint the town of her frowns into oblivion. She could use a set of plastic molars or designer luggage that could quote stock prices and tell when it was going to rain like gold fish inside the glass bowl eyes of a hot meteorologist slipping out of her business suit into something more suitable for embracing a lover made of clouds. Denise had gaunt and fiery eyes.

Fat hasn’t much to do with this story, though fat is in the news almost everyday, along with various pyramids of food that the populace should eat during its stressed-out, workaholic days before climbing aboard stationary bikes in musty cellars. Looking closely at the letter “r” (it’s right next to “s”) and remembering what an unintentional “s” absenteeism did for cosmic, it’s possible to
mistakenly write *fat* as *frat* if a finger nips the wrong key via insertion (and/or "r" yells out "present" for the hell of it). Frat is short for fraternity, which is nice if you belong to one, or are pledging for one, or just generally feel warm and fuzzy around folks with similar interests or ideas. In the "frat house" of words, however, *fat* parties with the following *frat* brothers: *tubby, obese, lard-butt, full figure, fat head, fat mouth, plump, chew the fat, fat ass, fat chance, corpulent, fleshy, chubby, rotund, blubbery, stout, portly, pudgy, fatty, fertile, productive, and rich.*

Denise and Irving had been married for so many years their divorced friends would often laugh at them and talk behind their backs like this:

"Denise is fat, don't you think," Divorced Friend One said.
"Irving is an idiot," Divorced Friend Two said.

Divorced Friend One and Divorced Friend Two would often drive down Denise's and Irving's street having these kinds of limited conversations, which was fine, until one day Divorced Friend One with Divorced Friend Two in the car tried the same conversation on her cell with Divorced Friend Three and drove right into a fat oak that would have nothing to do with cellular conversations about fat people and idiots.

Friendless, Denise and Irving spent their evenings in bouts of *Fat Sex* in the broken down environment of their bed's exhausted springs. *Fat Sex* was an Irving invention that Denise dug very much. Though no culinary genius, Irving could roast a pig with *fixins* and serve it to his mate with glee and honorable intentions. Denise would chow and bulge and afterwards liked to parade around their boudoir in skimpy lace undergarments that would leave Irving in a state of ecstatic recoil. Irving liked to shudder in the presence of Denise's very livable and lively fat, and Denise would often compliment Irving on his ability to maintain an amorous demeanor as she bounced up and down on top of him, having her way, as it were, with her man.

"Thatta boy," Denise cooed into his ear on these occasions. She didn't seem to notice or mind the babble of incoherent
sounds and sentences that flowed from Irving’s mouth on a wet string of squelched breaths that deigned a negative stance toward instant awareness (cosmic or comic) available to his mind via *Fat Sex* after pig and *fixins*. It was a brew, a spray, a slop of sounds, after all, that he spouted like a whale during these rough and ponderous poundings of sweet love, which if he hadn’t flipped off a whale boat into the cold Atlantic wouldn’t have caused the consternation to him that it did when his mind wandered from its fixation on Denise to a dense patch of stars he imagined shining above his pathetic city-lot of a backyard like flabbergasted fireflies. *Are stars numbers too?* he thought.

“Yes, honey,” Denise said. “Oh, yes!”
Freak-out Boy

Freak-out Boy negotiated the pedestrian traffic like a ball-bearing factory during a tectonic plate incident. So many people, he thought, with so much time on their hands for window displays featuring nude manikins, higher consciousness, and troubling addictions. What has the world come to? Freak-out Boy continued in thought, bouncing off this and that stray citizen like a pin ball energized by a particle accelerator.

“What’s the rush, asshole?” one citizen inquired, after Freak-out Boy went tilt with apoplectic jitters while waiting for the streetlight to change from you’re dead-to maybe you’re dead-to go ahead and take the chance that you’re not dead.

Freak-out Boy mused on his own consciousness like a mockingbird in a cell phone tree while waiting for the light to change and the anticipated demise to the situational tyranny of sucking down the various designer exhausts emitted by the colorful Sport Utility Vehicles, rushing in and out of the mirage of woods and open, rugged places as the tall buildings above them laughed and consorted with dour angels in gray and damaged clouds.

Freak-out Boy’s consciousness went something like this: IT was on a talk show with both the host and audience held captive by the chemical, synaptic, fireworks display of his words within the phenomenological milieu of his overall, general disembodiment. Where the hell did Freak-out Boy disappear to? Consider:

“As I was saying, Marv, there’s humor in annihilation. I mean, Marv, a great deal of our species’ time and energy has been spent on the development of weapons that will reduce us to rubble or dust and/or at the very least keep that thought circling in our heads like a mechanical blue whale with call waiting. And it’s not like the biggest and baddest of them developed by us aren’t also in the hands of our so-called enemies. And these enemies, Marv, think about these fellows for a moment. Who are they, really? Why they’re just another set of mammals with big brains and shrunken horizons. And
when they’re not admiring the bloom of flowers, watching their kids grow, or shopping for canned goods, they’re just as intent as us in having as many and varied destructive devices as possible to protect and safeguard their momentary (yea, ephemeral, fleeting, impermanent, transient, brief, fugitive, short-lived, passing, evanescent, interim) appearance on this poor, sick planet.”

But of course, before Marv or the hallucinogenic audience of Freak-out Boy’s consciousness could respond with questions and/or signs and symbols to indicate that Freak-out Boy made them sick to their collective gut-rumbling stomachs, and that he was without a doubt (or a doubting Thomas) a dimwit and contagious danger to society, the traffic light went from you’re dead to maybe you’re not dead, and with his new found friends at this particular rest stop, he raced across the perilous street in order to resume his journey down the next city block like a cheetah on amphetamines.
Who the Hell Isn’t?

The day Jack’s wife, Esmeralda, walked out the door she left his ears ringing with a parting shot: “I never had an orgasm with you.”

“Ouch,” Jack said later that night, looking in the bathroom mirror at himself. “Women really know how to hurt a guy.”

He ran a comb through his thinning brown hair and checked the bumps on his lower inner lip with his tongue. He looked deeply into his eyes. We’re tired, they said. She won’t be back.

Jack and Esmeralda had fought for years about food, politics, the weather, God, education, art, medicine, and children. In fact, Jack told his friend, Leroy, that it seemed like he had been fighting with Esmeralda since the moment after their first kiss of deep attraction.

“Go figure, Leroy,” Jack said. “It seems like that’s all I’ve ever done – fight with the wife.”

“Who the hell isn’t?” Leroy said.

Jack and Leroy worked together at the plant making stuff for the populace. What kinds of stuff? All kinds of stuff! Stuff you see in Wal-Mart, Home Depot, Kitchen Inc., Electronics Today, Total Auto, and You’ve Got To Have Medical Supplies. Stuff the populace needs to patch the holes in their lives, houses, teeth, and selves. Jack and Leroy made it – or at least some of it.

Does it matter?

Did it matter to them? No.

Leroy’s wife had left Leroy months earlier after posting her 95 Theses on the door of his monk room. Leroy reduced the parchment and kept a copy of it in his wallet. Sometimes he took it out of his pocket at their break and read some of the theses to Jack while they powered down packages of mini-doughnuts with machine coffee. Henrietta’s statements weren’t exactly Letterman like, but the first ten went:

1. You’re not a real man.
2. You're not a real man.
3. Etc.
Theses 50-84 documented a host of poor Leroy qualities:
50. You're not much of a plumber.
51. You're self-involved.
52. You're kind of stupid.
53. You're bald.
“Look, Jack,” Leroy said, wiping white sugar powder and crumbs from his mouth. “My woman was just too smart for me. She confused me with all of her theses and I didn’t have the slightest chance to improve.”
Jack took a slug of motor oil and threw a pensive rod. *Women are smarter than men?* he thought.
Leroy broke into a sheepish grin before reading Theses 85 – 95.
“Go,” Jack said. “I can take them.”
“Here...here...goes,” Leroy said, his voice unsteady with alarm.
Clutching the tiny document, he read:
85. Never had an orgasm.
86. Never had an orgasm.
87. Etc.
“I know your pain, bro,” Jack said.
Jack felt empty and isolated. The house wasn’t the same without Esmeralda. He especially missed their fights about weather. Esmeralda loved hurricanes more than tornadoes. He was fond of tornados. Esmeralda enjoyed large hailstones. He preferred small ones. Small for Jack meant ice cube size – something you gather from the yard and driveway, put in a whiskey glass, and pour Jameson’s over. Large for Esmeralda meant asteroid-like or at least big enough to replicate *Disney on Ice*. She loved figure skating, even when the skaters were dressed like Goofy and Minnie and the grand old Mouse himself.
Jack was a Democrat.
Esmeralda was a Republican.
Esmeralda believed in God.
Jack didn’t.
Jack had liver problems.
Esmeralda drank herb tea.
Esmeralda wanted kids.
Jack wasn’t sure.
Esmeralda championed Hopper.
Jack dug Pollack.
Esmeralda went to college.
Jack finished high school.
“O, the fights we used to have,” Jack intoned to an empty house.

Outside his bedroom window, a full moon – attached by a balloon string – hovered in the night sky. Esmeralda saw the moon, too, and wondered why.

Jack fell asleep.
Esmeralda didn’t.
Dwarf

I’m fat and like to wear boxer trunks in front of my loved ones. They hate me for this and other reasons. Sometimes I stand in front of the picture window in my trunks and dance for the old people shuffling and scuffling down the street. The old people don’t like what they see either. I’m not sure what causes them the most displeasure – the boxers, my dancing, bony legs, or the fact that I’m old like them.

I used to be young. I knew I was young because I wore white Fruit of the Loom briefs under tight pants. As a youngster, I did think white briefs were a tad uncomfortable, though I never would’ve considered wearing boxers back then, even the designer ones I can afford now – the ones with hieroglyphic writing and startling geometric patterns.

Of course briefs presented another problem other than the lack of comfort – the susceptibility to skidmarks. I remember the first time I discussed the skidmark factor with my wife Dolly. Dolly’s a lot younger than I am, and the sad fact is, she was in her childhood somewhere when I was this young guy in tight pants. We just couldn’t have known each other during that time. But now we live under the same roof with one of my sons from an earlier marriage, and like I said, they hate me for a bunch of reasons, but mostly for wearing boxer trunks in front of them.

My encounter with Dolly about the reality of skidmarks occurred one night in my upstairs studio while we were drinking an expensive Cabernet Sauvignon from crystal wine goblets. There’s nothing better than a fine “cabernet” filling up crystal. Dolly likes to drink and drinking with her reduces her hostility toward my trunks and me. We drink in my upstairs studio because my son, Horatio, is a big drinker and refuses to distinguish between a fifty-dollar cabernet and a ten-dollar one. He is an egalitarian when it comes to the consumption of alcohol – namely, he will drink any wine Dolly buys with equal gusto and efficiency. And yes, it is Dolly who
makes all the wine buys. She's got a ton of money, and I must admit I married her for her dough, as well as for her cheery personality. The fact that she married me simply because I was an old man and a failed writer never made too much sense to me. But nothing makes that much sense to me anymore.

So I told Dolly — after we uncorked a repeat bottle of cabernet — that my youth went by me in a flash. Sure, it's a wicked cliché, but Dolly had heard parts of this lament before — how I had frolicked sexually with many young women under an apple tree in my parents' yard and once drove my van into the Pacific chasing a swarm of blue butterflies after an acid trip failed to subside in the time promised by friends. "Yada, Yada," Dolly always said when I started in with the details. It just bugged her that I was so gone in the past when she was so present in her youth — right there before me, sipping cabernet, and more than willing to slip out of this silk blouse or that halter-top before I slipped into a deep snore on the top of my writing desk.

But she had never heard about the skidmarks on white briefs and at first the notion of them confused her. Somehow she got it in her head that skidmarks referred to the imprints left by a tractor-trailer or a fast car on the briefs themselves. That it was some type of game young males played with their underwear in traffic. She couldn't have been that fuckin' drunk on a cabernet — that confused — right?

I remember my response though when I heard her say: "I'm not mistaken, am I?" Why like one of those young fellas dodging an 18-wheeler, I shot up from my desk, looked right into her querulous eyes and said: "What's in that damn noodle of yours, Dolly? Skidmarks don't come from playing in traffic with your underpants. They happen because you don't wipe your goddamn ass properly."

I do get grumpy.
The Energy of Going Nowhere

It was supposed to rain and it did. Once again the damn Atlantic sent buckets and bouquets of the stuff to trickle and then stomp off Dan’s roof and windows.

Dan lived in a room in the upstairs of his house. It was a funny room with a low ceiling, lots of paper and dust, read and unread books — some scattered among the shirts and hangers on the floor — and a computer always on and humming its favorite white noise tunes and machine anthems.

Inside his room, Dan went places. Just last week, he traveled to Egypt, took a swim in the Nile, and later that night partied with his friends at the base of the Sphinx. When you consider that Dan had barely finished a paragraph on Egypt from a dog-eared National Geographic — that had somehow surfaced from the inner bowels of a paper mess like a volcanic rock — you’ve got to admit that Dan had and/or had developed a knack to transport himself via text to anyplace he chose.

The fact that he could bring friends was even more impressive. And Dan had many friends. Take William for instance. He lived in a room in his own house in another state with his wife and kids downstairs too, and like Dan’s own family, they planned and did all kinds of things together like shopping for groceries, painting the house, washing the cars, mowing the lawn, cleaning the cellar, washing the dishes, playing the piano, and taking well and sick birds, cats, and dogs to the vet for medicine and/or annual evaluations.

Dan and William and other friends of Dan and William didn’t do that kind of stuff much anymore with wives and offspring. They just lived in rooms outside of the daily action and when the time was right took extravagant, textual trips to exotic locales to get wasted and fucked-up.

Dan and his buddies were not that mature. In fact, William’s wife, Lilly, once said the following about Dan to William:
“Dan is without a doubt the most immature man I’ve ever met. He’s defective and truly the Ring Leader of Bad Behavior. “And at his age,” she continued, according to William in his weekly report to Dan, “the man should be – like you’re getting back to buster, or else – fully engaged in household activities, rather than inviting his lost and unfortunate friends on wild – and I don’t give a shit if they’re textual or not – escapades into higher consciousness and debauchery.”

“But, honey...,” William started to say, before getting zapped by Lilly’s steel eyes and retreating to his in-house resort in his own house, which was pretty much like Dan’s, and settling down into the business of reporting to Dan what was happening while up in his room and/or cautiously moving through the rest of his place.

However, to say that Dan had viable energy and enthusiasm for things beyond his immediate and appropriate condition – as a guy who went to work everyday (and who gives a damn about his occupation, for everyone knows that in today’s America, jobs are about robbing everyone of adequate leisure time, and why should there be any leisure anyway, what with television and the manikins on the tube showing all of us what is precisely not there for each and every one of us), interacted as best as he could with his family, and read when presented the opportunity in his cold turret of separation – is to overstate the energy packet (he’s a set of molecules, after all) Dan had been dealt. Of course, in his unfettered state, he had been to carnivals and zoos, and once in a fit of freedom, rented a powder-blue Cadillac convertible, and with a case of Budweiser as his traveling companion, roared across the cliff roads of Big Sur, California, with the glistening Pacific as his guardian angel. He flew off the cliffs and plummeted to his death only twice, but each time had been restored to his “hot-rod” odyssey by a briny angel and set again, like a virtual toy, on the serpentine road until he eventually made it to Sunset Boulevard for a tattoo of the setting sun on his taut stomach and a tarot card reading that pretty much went in his favor.

As he conveyed to William in a furtive missive, after reading in William’s report
that Lilly had struck his good buddy over the head with a frying pan for attempting to access the Yukon Territory and white water rafting on the Yukon River by arranging magnetic letters on the refrigerator:

"Back in the day, Debbie was an earth momma and gypsy (that tarot girl, remember?) who invited me back to her beaded pad for further conversation, occult interpretation, and fun (you know what I mean).

But that was then and now was definitely now, and Dan didn’t drive off cliffs anymore to alleviate boredom and test his freedom. As for the occult and the flunky pheromones of youth, what can be said? And with rain (freaking rain) striking his roof and eclipsing his thought process, thought patterns, and thoughts, the energy of going nowhere seemed right to him. And so without connecting his lonely, frantic, and fanatic friends to another page, paragraph, or sentence, he just listened to the racket of raindrops on roof and windows and remained in his room like words absent of mind.
Cheese Blimp
for XJ Dailey

Toothless believed in aviation like a case of simile hives in the pale, dry mind of a pretty or lonely librarian. “Again, an inconclusive semantic declaration,” Quantum Mouse said, like a piece of Swiss cheese.
Toothless was in love with the sky and inappropriate balloons of wanderlust. He was not lonely, but he lacked the exact highway of self-esteem to accept a bald head and midget thoughts. He once built a fantasy house out of Cheese Doodles and showed the petite mongrel of yesterday the proper technique for stuffing cheese into a split hot dog. He had no mission in life and was unable to tolerate the fans of his despair mocking his first attempts to fly with shingles of Velveeta cheese attached to his arms like melted, prehistoric feathers of Kitty Hawk.

Toothless’ girlfriend despised most forms of cheese, especially Cheeswiz. She once announced at a CA* meeting of quantum mice that she had never tried the “Veta.” She was a way-back, long ago, Spam girl, who wore flashy (fleshy) Spandex around Toothless’ pad like she had experienced a jeweled séance with a glitter salesman and part-time guru of pig meat. She had a friend who just loved a double whack of mayo on Spam-on-white-by-the-sea. For sometime, they had been intense lovers and overt mockers of calorie counts. Spam-boy often entered her dreams without so much as a whiff of cheese hanky-panky, which was not or even sort of OK.

Toothless was more or less obsessed with the idea of flying a piece of cheese into the sky, across the heavens, or at least above these great unWhitmanesque States. There was some competition. Already billionaires on TV in hot air balloons raced through the “eyes” of sequenced hurricanes for fun and sport while the mesmerized populace sank into spasms of obesity, hooked on partially hydrogenated food stuffs. Toothless was hip to that, but
knew his plot to rule the skies (i.e., launch his fantasy) and maybe the country from the techno-basket of a cheese dirigible would mean blowing these “bums” from the atmosphere, along with Snoopy in his MetLife Blimp and any other corporate “fat boys” advertising flotsam and jetsam from the display windows of clouds or jet stream.

The girlfriend, call her Sweet Gums, remained skeptical and highly entertained. What was the point of a cheese blimp wafting and waddling in the sky like an enormous, bloated mozzarella finger? There was always happy hour, she thought absently to herself. You know, hors d'oeuvres and such. As for competition in zombie-land, Sweet Gums distilled her thoughts to this: Well, old Toothless might be better served bringing some of that cheesy coup d'état zeal (pardon my French) to the impatient midnight hour.

Toothless on the other hand – like a good toasted cheese from the grill—remained convinced of his mission. A fondue-challenged populace deserved the chance to experience the melted wings of his hopes and dreams sizzling and seeping through the cracked sidewalks of their spent and daunted imaginations.

Quantum Mouse understood too. Through crosshairs of gorgonzola and brie, he saw the whole thing unfold like a bad sentence, one that refused to stop at a Diary Queen or acknowledge a smile from Wisconsin.

* Cheesoholic Anonymous
Dick

Dick was tired of being a subject, not of a sentence, but of vast experiments that had turned him into a certified – as opposed to uncertified, unofficial, fake, faux, inauthentic, sham, scam – blithering idiot.

The first experiment involved getting Dick some parents and having them raise him. The experimenters (so called scientists) behind this experiment interviewed various individuals caught raging in convenience stores or neighborhood bars and/or praying vociferously in churches still requiring hats, dollies, napkins, or some form of paper product on the heads of women. Thelma (of Doileyville) and Al (of *I'll kick your teeth in* after three shots of bar whiskey with chasers, who reigned supreme on the end barstool in *Jack's Pub & Arcade*) were chosen after taking a set off strenuous personality tests while earning a small fee, a bunch of green stamps, and coupons for free oil changes and front and rear alignments for participation.

The tests revealed that Thelma and Al could get along up to five years before inevitable marital disintegration. Thelma and Al were told by the experimenters (so called scientists) that they were an ideal couple and obviously ready to marry and have a child. This seemed fine with them and when they were handed a baby by the experimenters (so called scientists), they expressed more joy than surprise and graciously accepted a ten thousand dollar check as start-up funds to get married and raise the infant. “There’s only one condition to all of this,” the experimenters (so called scientists) said. “You have to name the baby, Dick.”

“Fine by me,” Al said.

“All right,” Thelma said.

And together they gazed at the infant and said:

“Hi, Dick.”

(Now just suppose Dick’s fate was simply to be the subject of a sentence rather than an actual subject to be experimented on by
experimenters (so called scientists). Then Dick’s fate or tale could be reduced to a line like this: *For many years, Dick didn’t know that his name was slang for the male sexual organ.*

Thelma and Al lasted four and a half years together before they thought it best to return Dick to the experimenters (so called scientists). They did have some problems finding the harmony point between hard praying and hard drinking, but they didn’t get along too bad. It was mostly, Dick. You might say Dick was a dick. At least that’s what Thelma said, handing him back to the experimenters (so called scientists):

“He’s just an impossible little kid who does endlessly strange things.”

Al piped in: “Well, for the last two months he thought he was a bull. . . .”

After some knowing nods by the experimenters (so called scientists), Al continued:

“Yeah, a bull, and like he runs into walls and crap, knocking stuff over, you know, like lights and knickknacks onto the floor, before pretty much knocking himself out.”

“Ok, then,” the experimenters (so called scientists) said, taking Dick back.

After some intense debate about his choice of animal and their choice of a name, the experimenters (so called scientists) agreed that he was still a bit too young to consciously understand the implications of his name. The fact that he could be a dick had more to do with the gene pool acting out than anything else in their opinion.

For the next storybook years, the experimenters (so called scientists) raised Dick themselves, feeding him human growth hormones with burgers and fries. Dick got huge (no lie), and by the time of his high school years, the experimenters (so called scientists) had set up their next experiment, naming their study: *How Would Dick Fair in a Catholic High School?*

After finding a couple (via ads in *Psychology Today* and the Love Advertisements in various tabloids) who had always wanted a
child, but couldn’t, and installing Dick with them, they hypothesized that Dick would have a good time but probably be expelled by the end of his sophomore year.

As experimenters (so called scientists) go, they were pretty smart and on the money.

Dick landed on his ass and out of the Catholic school (St. Mike’s of Scranton) at the beginning of his junior year for not containing his mirth, glee, guffaws, and belly-gut laughter when it was his turn to read in a “round robin” fashion from a text called Why Wait Until Marriage?

When Sister Marie asked Dick to explain his inappropriate laughter and behavior, Dick said:

“Me and most of the girls in this class has done it.”

Later, in the principal’s office, finishing up expulsion paperwork, Sister Marie informed Principal Xavier that she was almost as shocked by Dick’s grammar as by his lascivious antics with the female enrollment.

Over the years, the experimenters (so called scientists) ran plenty of other experiments and tests on poor Dick. There was one in which is own son asked him if he knew his name meant penis. Tough experiments that took their toll on Dick.
Where's Your Sex Drive, Chump?

Cal looked out the window at the pigeons screwing on the roof next door. He had a good view of the bird orgy from his third floor apartment in the urban infested area in which he lived. The place next to him was a broken-down two-storey house in chipped paint heaven, and the scruffy pigeons did their love-making on a slanted shingled roof in the hot sun. Boy, Cal thought, look at them go at, even though the fake owl at the point of the roof looked on with fake disapproval on the gauche acts.

Cal shook the staring from his eyes and cast them backward into his head like fish bait into reverie. Once hooked, Reverie spoke in plain English with a typical genie-in-the-bottle authority. "You once had good sex, too," it said. To back up the statement, Reverie revealed to Cal a hot image of his wife Kelly on a day that she and he had sipped Dom Perignon in the nude from Styrofoam cups before succumbing to the pleasures of champagne-tinged love on a tattered oriental carpet.

My God, Cal thought, as the sound of pigeon wings stirred the hot air into a dusty, bus-intoxicated must that filtered through the screen window with regret and toxic longing, what has happened to my sex drive?

Good question, chump. Let's explore.

His wife, Kelly, was no help. For some, strange clockwork reason, she stopped wearing bikinis and/or halter-tops with cutoff jeans around their environs, preferring — like a sudden conversion to an exotic faith (Zoroastrianism for the hell of it) — oversize turtle-necks with corduroy pants and orange-laced work boots, even during the blazing heat of urban summers. During the colder months, months in which snow fell to the ground like silver bricks, she added to the summer garb sweaters and Eskimo coats, occasionally donning a thermal ski mask and thinsulated gloves before hitting the sack and blowing a perfunctory kiss to Cal, whether he was next to her and/or tearing his hair out in front of
late-night cable TV. Most of time, he was in front of cable TV, cuing up channels offering sex-therapy and discounts on amazing juicers hawked by buffed old guys (deep into their sixties), showing home videos of themselves chasing down nymphs on the beach after chugging down a carrot, prune, and turnip concoction.

For Kelly, the loss of a sex drive in her man (and possibly herself) was a natural thing, maybe even a good thing; at least she didn’t spend time thinking too much about it. And when Cal badgered her about it, she offered him some simple advice: “Get a real problem,” she said. However, when the Calster needed a real awakening, delivered, say, in a language stream equivalent to staccato jabs to his noodle, followed by a left hook to his glass intolerance, she opined: “What the f--- did you thing we’d be doing together after twenty years? French kissing? Heavy petting? I don’t think so, honey bummer!”

Cal wasn’t so sure. Even from the floor of an imaginary canvas with sibilant stars pounding his eardrums, he could still sense a young man or young animal still inside of him that wouldn’t mine some of that action.

What was the chump to do?

He couldn’t tag his *I’m not getting none* dilemma on his brother’s long-standing theory that the loss of a sex drive – as in out the window, man, by some ironic fiat of nature – dances like a mad hatter into a relationship the moment a kid arrives. His brother, Hop-a-long Cassidy, lived in another urban place with a horde of children and enough loneliness to fill the Playboy Mansion. Every now and then, Hoppy called to report on and rail against his condition to his brother.

“Yep siree, Cal,” Hoppy detailed, during one call. “I’ve been living by myself for eight freaking years in the corral of an attic bedroom, bro, while the offspring and the little woman party hard all over the house. They get along so well, and so well without me, what the hell I’m supposed to do? I got my *Philosophiae Doctor* in celibacy living in that freakin’ room. And wifey, bro, all she can say is: ‘*My my, let’s not cry over once upon a time.*’”
“Maybe we’re just freaks,” Cal retorted. “Maybe it’s not like this for the rest of the guys out there. Maybe some relationships don’t tamper down into a null set of quotidian smiles and domestic routines. Maybe they burn like wild fires out of control, burn with the ferocity of losing everything in a moment of sensual pleasure, burn like youth, like the day, like the stars and the planet.”

After an interminably awkward moment of chump telecommunication silence on the lines – the kind of silence requiring the thumbs to twiddle and fingers to drum – Hoppy sighed:

“How have you gone nutso, Cal? Has that pigeon-watching got to you, boy?”
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