

A short conversation between gentlemen by Shane M.

"I'm telling you, it just ain't right!" Floyd growled in a guttural tone that smacked of rocks and late night cigars. "It just ain't natural, and I'm a guy who loves... natural... um... things." Floyd hiked his pants up over his flabby stomach as he bit, with much carefulness, into another Twinkie. A crumb dropped from between his fingers, rolled down his shirt and landed on Earl's boot. Earl glanced down with a curled snarl and shook it off.

"See, that's your problem Floyd, you focus on the little picture instead of grandiose plans. You'll never escape the prison that is your mind if you aren't willing to embrace how fickle truth is." Earl sneered down his long nose at the smaller, fat man as he steered their vehicle into the turnout next to the bridge that crossed over the river. "You always fail to grasp how one man's truth is another man's lieaaaaa....!" The thinner man had exited the truck and dropped down directly into a puddle. The wetness had quickly soaked his trousers all the way up to his knee causing a string of nonsensical sounds to be thrust in the air where they hung, disturbingly.

"Sassafras and every hell!" roared Earl. "Just my luck to get wet before we're even in the river..." He out a small scream, quiet enough only the bugs in the nearby bushes knew his inner turmoil.

"Oh Earl, such language. We'll be lucky if the local authorities don't hear you from the next two towns over." Floyd had exited the other side and was finishing his Twinkie as he rounded around the front of the truck. He licked the last bit of icing out from inside the yellow treat before tossing the rest of it over his shoulder into a bush. The corners of his mouth drew up in a dodgy smile. "Ya know... you need to keep your head on a swivel! Always know what's in and around you!"

"Yes, yes, I kno... wait."

"Wait what?"

"How do you NOT know what's in you at all times?"

"Well," Floyd grabbed his earlobe to think. "I mean what about spiders?"

"What about them?"

"You know you eat a bunch of them in your sleep at night, right?"

"No, I didn't know that. That sounds like something a man terrified of spiders would think up. What, do they tap-dance across one's face and leap off your cheek like a bloody diver?!? Hmm??" harrumphed Mr. Johnson, harrumphing at his inability to picture a spider in a bathing-suit. He shook his head and shook his pant leg. "Nothing natural about eating spiders in your sleep."

"See, that's where you're wrong my friend," grinned Mr. Underweather. "Tain't nothing more natural than eating creatures of all walks. Why, I reckon there are places where critters are eaten just as often as horses, and with the same zeal!"

“Okay, see, now I know you’re pulling my leg,” said Earl, rattling whatever lingering wetness he could off his trousers. “Now you’re throwing equine species into this? And just how in the hell do you eat a horse in your sleep?”

“Start at either end I would assume!” . Floyd guffawed as he unlatched the back doors of the truck. “Now that is a sight people would pay good money to see,” he said. “Not sure where I’d start... maybe the ears.” He pulled open the two big rear doors and reached inside. Dragging out what appeared to be a long, shaggy red carpet, the man stood to the side as half of it fell to the ground. “That way it couldn’t hear me.”

“Ohhhh really Floyd?! I know you couldn’t hurt more than a fly even if you tried your hardest. Remember that time in Toronto? We were lucky to escape with all four limbs when you refused to wrestle that bear.”

“I mean... you would have hesitated too if you had seen the look in his eye.” Floyd dabbed at his suddenly wet brow. “The size of their feet, you’d have run away too!” He muttered the last part to himself and shuddered as he grabbed the part of the rolled-up carpet still in the truck. At that same moment, Earl grabbed the carpet on the other side just a hands-width lower than Floyd.

“Wait, what are you thinking you dunce?” huffed the struggling thin man.

“My back...”

“Yes, you witless ninny of a chap. I know all about your back. But you must understand how bad it would be for mine. I have two ribs that broke and never felt right, as well as a weak spine.”

“Oh oh, a weak spine suits you! I can’t understand how you think you are worse off than me, with my THREE slipped discs, ulcer, and the emotional remnants of a broken heart!” Earl yanked the carpet towards himself, almost completely upending the portly, other gentlemen.

“Come now Earl,” Floyd put on his saddest looking face... pursed lips, eyes wide, his nostrils flared a little. The same face worked perfectly when he grabbed a random coffee off the counter at a diner in town. Indeed no one had said a word to him as he had backed out of the place, so he assumed it worked like a charm.

“Perhaps we can work out something beneficial to us both.”

“I remain skeptical. Any and all attempts to weasel your way onto this end will be met with justified force.”

“Well that seems like an undesirable outcome for both of us. What say we just... both carry from this end?”

“How do we each carry from the same end?”

“We can do it anyway we want. It isn’t like someone is watching us menacingly from the bushes and judging us on our execution of this task.”

“What the hell are they doing?” muttered Officer Grayson in a nearby bush. He had spent the last six hours waiting for this moment, only to find himself

muttering quietly about the farcical crime being committed. "They've been grabbing at the same end of the carpet for five minutes now." He handed his binoculars to Officer Jay crouched next to him, who took them before cleaning both eye holes and pressing them against his face.

"I don't know sir. Are they arguing, or are they laughing?" Officer Jay suppressed a snuffle as he handed back the long-range specs. "Are they hugging now? I can't tell."

"Me neither. The whole thing stinks, and I really need to go pee."

"Well sir, sometimes the best things start out smelling weird."

"I'd believe that with food, but not people. I have yet to meet a person who smells what I would call good. I have a fantastic nose you see."

"Well I do see your nose sir, and it is a fantastic one to be sure. I just can't believe you haven't found someone that smells, well... at least alright." Officer Jay flicked a non-smelling bug off his pant leg straight onto the prone figure of Officer Grayson. "I remember this girl from a dance a year or so back in the town square... she smelt like fresh linens and elderberries."

Grayson glanced back his fellow cop and saw his eyes glazing over at the memory. "Oi, keep your head on straight," he lowly growled at his subordinate. "Any sightseeing through your mind and I'll start docking your pay. Cops aren't allowed an imagination anyways."

"Well that's just sad," muttered Jay as he pushed the delightful smells towards the back of his mind. "Sir, can you smell anything at all? Or do you suffer from nose blindness??"

"What?," whispered Grayson loudly. "How does your nose go blind? That seems like one of those whatchamacallit... catch twenty-two's?"

"Sir, I don't think..." began Officer Jay, but his superior cut him off with a chopping hand motion that struck nearby branches and caused more noise than all their words had. The two criminals had finally finished their discussion and were starting to make their way down to the river. Both had grabbed the same end of the carpet, and both were facing the same way as they started to wrench it backwards. They began dragging the carpet away from the truck, but their feet were getting tangled together on each attempt.

"Okay, seriously Earl. You still haven't explained to me how this is going to work." Floyd looked at the back of his companions head since it was all he could really see in front of him. "I keep kicking the back of your legs and my toes are starting to hurt."

"How do you think I feel, ya louse!" responded Earl, fighting the temptation to retaliate from the pain in the back of his legs. Another kick to his already raw right leg almost caused him to drop the rolled carpet right then and there. "Stop stop stop. This isn't going to work if I can't walk from your incessant kicking!"

"That's what I've been saying though. My poor toes don't feel right. So... maybe you should go grab the other end?"

"We've been over this Floyd. Neither of our backs can handle picking up that sort of weight off the ground. Plus, this feels mighty light with both of us on this end."

"Very true, but we can't keep this up if we're injuring ourselves."

"Only one of us is kicking the other though, and it isn't me!"

"Well, my toes still hurt, so it's not like you aren't hurting me too!"

"That may be, but if you kick me again it'll be more than your toes that hurt like the dickens!"

"Alright, so what are we going to do about it?" huffed hurting-toes Earl. He curled his foot in his shoe, almost causing him to swear but only a quiet 'raaaa' escaped the thin man's lips.

"Okay, gimme a second to think about this. As two grown, but definitely gimpy men, we should be able to use our intellect to figure this out." Floyd tucked the carpet under one arm and wiped his brow with his sleeve. "You need to stop kicking me... ah ha! I've figured it out!"

"Please tell me Floyd, my poor toes..."

"Enough with your toes. I think if I turn around, you won't be kicking the back of my leg anymore and we'll both be saved from more ludicrous pain."

"I'm willing to try anything at this point. I'm holding tightly so let's attempt this idea of yours."

"Hmm, so let me just... turn like this... and maybe move my hand over here... perfect. Now to just move more over there... okay, let's see how this works." The smaller man was now almost nose to chin with his slightly taller compatriot. "So let's try this then."

The two men tried to move, but they immediately kicked each other in the shins eliciting yelps from both. Earl rubbed his shin with his foot while biting his cheek in pain. They both stared infuriated at each other before trying again to move, which resulted in even worse kicks and utterances of pain.

"Ahh! Stop! This isn't working," shrieked Floyd as he almost dropped the rug in pain. "You have to pay attention!"

Earl continued to rub his shin with his other foot while staring angrily at his co-conspirator. "You have had my full attention since the start, and I'm still getting hurt!"

"Let's try something else then. Maybe we should go back to back, that might ensure we are unable to strike each other."

"I dunno Floyd... all of your ideas haven't worked out well for either of us so far."

"Look, let's just try it. Take it slow. If it doesn't work, I'll let you pick what we do next."

"Well... fine. But who is going to turn around first?"

"You... no, me. I'll turn first. Just watch out for my feet."

"How am I suppose to watch your feet while I'm holding all this... weight?"

Earl glanced quickly down at both of their feet, sweating with the effort of keeping the large rug held aloft. Floyd quickly turned around and grabbed the rug again.

"Okay Earl, now you turn around right quick and we'll see if this works. If nothing else, at least your toes should be alright afterwards."

"Well, if you say so..." sighed Earl. He was hesitant to let go, his toes hurt like the dickens, he was sweating something fierce, and he didn't fully trust that Floyd would be able to keep the rug aloft by himself. He decided to spin as fast as he could after letting go to ensure the heavy object didn't slip.

So as Earl spun around quicker than he knew how to, his elbows swung wide with his slender body's momentum. The resounding thud of the most pointy appendage between his arm and his hand making full contact with the side of his partners head echoed throughout the nearby trees, down to the water (which managed to startle some rather miffed catfish), and back against the truck before the sound dissipated into the cool, evening air. Earl grabbed his elbow, tears welling in his eyes as he dropped to his knees, a wail of concern splitting his lips into an almost howl.

His associate didn't make a sound as the rug slipped from his fingers. He uttered not a word as he dropped to first his knees, then dirt and dust was cradling his head as he fell face-first onto the ground.

Earl couldn't hear the sounds of suppressed mirth coming from the shrouded trees and bushes nearby as he grabbed his elbow and continued to swear up into the sky above.

"Cheese and biscuits and the seven hells that birthed everything foul! Ahhhh!!" he shouted into the darkening sky. "I can't feel my fingers, my wrist or anything else along my arm! Damn it Floyd, why couldn't you..." His words trailed off as he finally noticed the carpet had been dropped and become partly unrolled in the turnout they had parked in. "What in the...?" he started before remembering his Bosses very specific instructions to Floyd and himself. 'First rule about this job, don't looking in the fucking rug. Second rule, DON'T LOOK IN THE FACKING RUG!' was all his boss had said before giving them directions to where the rug now lay partly opened and was indeed being looked at.

The rug itself had been a larger than average red-trimmed with white center rug in the boss's office. Indeed, Earl had stepped across it many times to pay his respect to the boss. Only this time it looked vastly different. A small purple-reddish stain sat just off center, drawing the eye like a lone inkblot on a piece of white paper.

So intently was Earl staring at the soiled smudge, he didn't even notice the two law officers emerging from the forest like expert rangers. They quickly approached the distracted gentlemen, and in a few strides were directly behind him.

"Hands up sir!" Officer Grayson poked his service revolver into the still inattentive man's back.

The thin man's arms shot upwards immediately, almost before he had fully realized what was happening. One arm went straight up, but the other was still smarting enough he left it bent at an angle.

"Who... hey, who are you guys?" demanded Earl.

"Well, obviously we're the police. Who else would be out here this late in the day?" Grayson motioned for his partner to check the still out cold male on the ground. "No sudden moves, no making a break for it, and definitely don't try to turn around. I've seen what that kind of move can do to a man."

"It was an accident! I swear!" begged Earl as the situation finally dawned on him. "I didn't mean to kill him! I was just so tired, and hot, and my toes are killing me from where his leg kept running into them!"

"I doubt he's dead, though that was quite a wallop you gave." The officer turned to his subordinate. "How is he?"

"Oh he's very much alive," responded Officer Jay as he put handcuffs on the still prone Floyd. "The bump on the side of his head will probably hurt when he wakes up though."

After finishing up cuffing the prone, larger man, the officer turned and watched as his superior placed the skinnier individual in the same hand restraints. His eyes dropped to the partly unfurled carpet, running his burgeoning detective eyes over every square foot of the crucial evidence. He took in the sight of the stain, his gaze lingering on the potential damning clue.

"Careful with that rug," Officer Grayson cautioned as he held onto the sullen looking Earl. "That could be a crucial piece in finding out just what these two gentlemen were up to this late in the evening. Why, I wouldn't be surprised if someone had met their maker here. Punched their last ticket. Had their clock cleaned. Maybe it will be evidence in a unsolvable cri..."

"Sir, it's wine," interrupted Jay as he stood up from examining the spot.

"What?!" exclaimed Grayson angrily.

"What?" squeaked Earl quietly.

"Yes sir, it smells just like the communion wine they use down at the chapel on 7th avenue. It's pretty fresh smelling too, with a hint of fruit behind the wine smell. Reminds me of a rather bold Cabernet I had with dinner the other night. It paired perfectly with this full size Rock Cod at this new pla..."

This time Grayson interrupted his subordinate: "How sure are you? I mean, is there any chance it's just blood that smells like wine??"

"No sir. I know my blood and wine and this is without a doubt just wine. Though it makes me wonder what they were planning to do with it." He glanced at the sheepish looking Earl. The man was trying to appear as small as possible in the detectives firm grip, but it was Officer Grayson that actually responded.

“Red wine on a white rug? It may as well be trash now.”