

Action Courtney

Look into Flapper's window to see what you normally would not want to. Is it a toy designer, designing something to trump the Teeny Tot's Toy Manufacturer's line of Ugly Stuffed Animals (28 million units sold) a decade ago? Incorrect. It is a man (Flapper) gawking at the weblog of his childhood crush, Courtney Lockhart. It is worth noting that he doesn't actually live here. The landlady kicked him out eight months ago because he didn't pay his rent, the money for which was rather ill-spent. We don't know what he bought. We don't know either if Courtney ever knew him. We are fairly certain love was not mutual between them.

Even though he (Flapper) lives here no longer, his property does. On his mantle are toys from Rainbow Pixie Unicorn Land (45 million units sold), the aforementioned Ugly Stuffed animals, and the Teeny Tots Toy Manufacturer's most recent franchise, stalker hobo (4 units sold, world wide. O, what are they going to do with all that plastic?)

Walk down the toy aisle of any store with a general inventory, and you will inevitably find a cascade of Harvey Luddings. Here, watch as Mrs. Jallopy glances down the toy aisle, snorts, and pushes her rusty cart onward, to practical sections of the store to find items worth buying. Saturating the toy aisle, encased in shiny grey cardboard boxes, is the aforementioned Stalker Hobo.

They might pass for natural hobos. Not one of them has ever left the store. They are grimy and unshaven of the skin, loose-clothed and taught-jointed, and at the same time washable, with an extra pack of dirt. An abundance of dust covers their boxes, and the accumulation is beginning to shift to the sides of each box. The boxes are tightly packed into the aisle to accommodate other unsold units, whose boxes, by the way, measure a measly three inches.

They had perhaps invested a bit too heartily in the success of this homeless plastic man. No doubt (judging by its presence in the stores) it had been praised by the board of review, gratified handshakes were traded, and the little man was shipped off to the slums of the supermarket shelves. The action figures will spend their entire lives in that one place, awaiting a "big break" that is never to come. Although the toy was expected to draw in a dual demographic -- a packet of smut for girls to smear around his face as a form of make-up, and a flammable warning to introduce boys to the world of unsafe play-things -- profits never came to existence.

We can't say for certain if Flapper came up with Stalker Hobo, but we doubt that he did. For one thing, Flapper keeps drawings of all his pitches around. Not at his house, obviously, but he has a few unwise hiding places in the park. A public park. Open to the public. Since litter is something that the masses discourage, his designs can be found in the local trash bins. We've seen most of what was thrown away, and Stalker Hobo has disgraced none of these pictures.

Rather, we might attribute the toy's inspiration to that of Flapper's character (which in turn might be attributed to mercury poisoning). Neither his eviction nor his infatuation with Courtney is kept a secret from his coworkers. The idea perhaps came from a sharply observant colleague. It most likely arose as a sort of joke: "Say, look at that Flapper, he has no home and is constantly stalking a woman through the internet. Is he a hobo stalker or what?" We'll let the rest of the scenario play through your imagination. And now that the Stalker Hobo launch has failed, TTTM is positioned to

make a desperate sales pitch. Nobody knows what goes on in these meetings because they take place in an office building, in a room high above the clouds. We can always guess what's going on.

"I blame the commercials," suggests Jill. "I know we're not the advertising department, but all the commercials showed was a filthy old man peering over fences and out of water drains as elevator music played. Nobody knew what we were advertising, even when we showed the toy." This is definitely true. TVs nation-wide showed ninety seconds of a live-action man doing all those things Jill said. The actual toy only showed up for seven seconds.

We don't recognize the old lady in question, but we do know that she, in the commercial, is not the only one to be spied upon. There is also in the commercial a {young} lady, crossing the street with a grocery bag. The swivelling toss of her hair calls too much attention to itself to belong in anything but a shampoo commercial. It is from this commercial that Flapper is infused with the gumption to crash the design meeting and slap down a picture of Courtney. "Such women should not be wasted on failure merchandise!" he proclaims as he throws the remote at the TV screen, shattering it for the enraged ignorance of the land lady.

Flapper threw the remote for certain. We can confirm this. What we do not know is what happens at the toy design meeting. Having seen Flapper's passionate quest for his beloved Courtney, it's likely that his intellectual superiors (albeit artistic inferiors) try to discourage him, having no license to unit of hot plastic and mold their an image of an actual person.

Like it has been said earlier, nobody knows for certain what goes on in a toy design meeting. But given the nature of middle-class competition and jealousy, the meeting probably goes something like this:

Flapper bursts into the room without knocking. He has keys, after all. One can hear them rattling in his pocket like a legion of silver marbles. This is too urgent a situation to let silly old manners get in the way.

"I've got it," he declares, "I've got the thing that will push Teeny Tots back up the charts!"

He slaps down a picture, but nobody looks at it. They are too busy trying to exorcise the intruder from their meeting.

"This had better not be about your passion for Courtney Lockhart again," says Beagh.

"It is," says Jill.

"Flapper, we are in the middle of a design meeting," explains Lucrezo, handing back the drawing, carefully herding his gaze from the thing in the drawing.

"Well," Flapper accepts the drawing without the rejection, "I want you to design this."

Flapper thrusts himself into a chair.

"See, I know that that Stalker Hobo doll didn't go over too well. I mean, how many of them have you sold in the three months they've been in stores? Like, seven?"

"Four," says Jill. Clearly, she has no respect for the nomadic investigator.

Flapper cackles (in hardly a private manner).

"Well, guess what? I bought one. I'll bet the other ones were bought by your employees, too. Jill? Beagh? Got something to confess?"

"Flapper, get out."

"Okay, I'll be good. I swear... all right. Well, as you know, Courtney has a sort of beauty that captivates you, and makes you forget yourself for a while. Quite some time, really."

He holds up the picture, cornering their choice of NOT looking at it and then strangling it. The three of them, the toy designers who led the children of the world to the latest grounds in the toy market, see the object of Flapper's immortal pursuit. Courtney has a little of everything in her: a little grace, a little prestige, a little sadness, a little delicacy, and even a little action. What might they be thinking? Has Flapper, instead of bringing himself closer to Courtney by remodeling her as a marketable play-thing, created a pair of rivals in Beagh and Lucrezo? And what of Jill, who appreciates beauty but not when it surpasses her own?

"Is that... Courtney Lockhart?" says Beagh.

"Yup. She has it all," says Flapper.

Lucrezo HAD half-forgotten himself, but he regains his prejudice confronts Flapper:

"Look, I'll admit she's something else," he says, "but I don't think we can accept your offer. I'm sorry, Flapper--"

"What's wrong with her?"

"What's wrong with YOU?" says Jill. "This is a real person you want to make an action figure out of."

"That would be... what? Slander? Libel?" Common sense does not welcome itself to Beagh's mind.

"Can't think of a name for a sculptural crime, can you, Beagh?" scoffs Flapper.

If such an effect Courtney lays upon people from the mere constraining window of a photograph, you might ask yourself: "But wait, is this Courtney Lockhart, so hypnotizing in word of mouth, sure to be more so when in plain view, a hermit? Is there not an unstoppable alliance of men at her door step, poised to chase her down and snatch her wrist in marital union?" You might ask the same question to me, and I will tell you the answer. Yes, Courtney has on men a mesmerizing effect, one that is broken by her own contract of bachelorism: She will not marry a man who has less money than she does. This criteria is enforced by a runt (blessed with inordinate hidden muscle) who answers the door to any man with a shilly-shally bouquet and tin of quality chocolates, asking, "How much money do ya got?"

"Well," says Lucrezo, "If we change certain details... I mean, you usually can't tell when an action figure is modeled after somebody."

"Precisely," says Flapper. "I have taken care of all of that. I have a clay prototype here in my pocket. The real deal will be plastic, so it will be much shinier."

It was. The contractor, who had not even seen Courtney's photograph, was immediately convinced that advertising should begin at once.

In the commercial, there is a woman. But nobody pays attention to her. They know what is being advertised this time. The ground-breaking feminist action figure, "Action Courtney," is the center of attention the whole way through. But Teeny Tots Toys soon learns that they need no assistance from any half-minute commercial. Within the first minute of delivery, a hostile, hungry crowd, wallets held high, charged the protective boxes that held the fabled action figure.

"Today is the day our sweet nation adopts a daughter and names her 'Action Courtney,'" says a popular magazine. "We never would have guessed that such a reward would have come from the same company that patented such sordid mayhem as 'Stalker Hobo.' True, 'Rainbow Pixie Unicorn Land' and 'Ugly Stuffed Animals' both have contenders with their portraits in the hall of fame, but all of those things are best forgotten. Yes, 'Action Courtney' represents a new generation of action figures that bleaches the memory of her ancestors. One might argue that she is only the latest in a long line of fads, but I believe I speak for all the world when I say, 'Action Courtney, welcome home.'"

"Action Courtney is the Tickle-Me-Elmo of our generation," declares a professional wrestler to his body-builder friends, all wildly intrigued by the latest addition to his collection of good luck charms. "I rub it before every time I go into the ring. I haven't lost a single match since."

"I'm going to buy my papa an Action Courtney," chirps a skippy young lad on his way into the toy store, "given that there's any left. I went into the store last week, at there was nothing there. I went in again a few days ago, and there was still nothing there. If there is nothing there again today, I will go into the storage room and open all of the boxes until I find an Action Courtney. Then I'm going to buy it."

There was an elegant tea party among rich young ladies nearing the end of October. "Action Courtney tops my Christmas wish-list," said the hostess to her affluent friends. "Otherwise, the list follows from most expensive to least desired." Action Courtney cost \$3.89.

Most of the profits went to Flapper, who, combating a doubtless, greedy foresight in a contract negotiator, worked his own share to 70%. The resulting monetary gain is enough for him to buy the renthouse in which he formerly lived and kick out the landlady, which he may well do. As for the original Courtney, she purchased one for her own niece without ever knowing she herself served as the inspiration. Have you ever met Courtney Lockhart? In the unlikely event that you do, it would be nice if you were to tell her that Flapper wants a word with her.