

The Mishaps of Michael Murphy

A

He stood on his head in reception - boasting. Michael Murphy - Wellington boots waving erratically as the unimpressed woman behind the desk shook her head. "I can do this for quite a while," he chuffed, his facial skin turning into an overgrown beetroot. "And it's worth every second, just to prove my name really *is* Michael Murphy.

For when this 43 year old jester - albeit unintentionally - stood on his skull, his jumper clearly showed the initials M. M. Big swirly blue Ms against a background of peach proved he was, without doubt, telling the truth.

"But when you came in, before your acrobatic session, your initials were W. W.," replied the receptionist, rummaging through a desk drawer.

"It depends which way you read them," said Michael Murphy, returning to his size 9s, which were lost inside the humorous rubber boots.

"See, it clearly states W. W.," argued the young woman.

"I tell you, madam, on my pet ferret's life, my name is Michael Murphy."

"It could be Willy Wonka," said the receptionist, half chuckling. "Or... William Wordsworth! Or... Or..."

"Wayne Whizzlewopp," interrupted Michael. "But it's not. I give you my word. My name truly *is* Michael Murphy."

"Are you sure you have no i.d. at all?"

"None," answered Michael, "apart from a..." And from his tweed trouser pocket he pulled a crumpled piece of card which faintly claimed: BUBBLEGUM BLOWERS CLUB; OFFICIAL MEMBER.

Flapping the tatty membership card in front of the receptionist's slightly frustrated face, he went on, "and I can *still* prove it! Watch this..."

From the opposite tweed trouser pocket, Michael Murphy revealed a pack of Hubba Bubba. Then, after fishing deeper, a pack of Hubba Bubba Extreme exposed itself. With his short chubby fingers, he squeezed three rectangular pieces from each and began the unwrapping process.

"You don't have to..." pleaded the young lady, her face warming up a tad.

Like a procession of rubbery red blocks, in they flew, his jaws widened by an invisible jack.

Then he chewed and chewed desperately, which caused his jaw bones to clink and clonk. Clink clonk, clonk clink they went amusingly, playing a tune which would be greatly accompanied by lyrics...

Michael Murphy's Jaw-Bone Jive:

Jaw-bones aren't supposed to clink

Are they? Should they clonk?

Both mine do, clink clonk to you,

Clonky, clinky, clonk!

Jaw-bones when one chews might well

Boast a clonky clink,

Don't be shy and don't deny

To you clonks let's drink!

Next, he began to blow.

He blew and he blew as his cherry cheeks grew. As did a bubble! A rubbery pink bubble gaining size by the second. Soon enough it was as big as his head. Wider and wider and taller and taller it became - expanding towards the ceiling and floor...

"I believe you!" shrieked the receptionist, her eyeballs bulging like a fat pig's belly. 'I believe you Mr Murphy. I believe you!"

But on the bubble expanded.

It pulsed and it throbbed. It bulged and it wobbled.

Bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger, and bigger and BIGGER and BIGGER and **BIGGER** and **BIGGER** and **BIGGER**...

* * * *

"Is it fireworks night already?" an elderly lady asked her friend, who had fainted...

B

With the remains of pink gum splattered around his cakehole, Michael Murphy inserted the key into the lock. Well - he tried. He tried and he tried and he tried. He forced it. He twisted it. He begged it. He head-butted it! "I think she's given me the wrong one," he said, stroking his forehead as though it were a kitten. "Number 66 it says on the tag, and number 66 it says on the door."

Once more he tried. He wiggled it. He patted it. He pleaded with it. He removed his right welly and hammered it! But still no joy.

A man wearing a maroon shirt with shoulder length black hair and very, very long incisors strolled past. "Excuse me, toothy feller," said Michael, waving his key like a flag. "But this key doesn't seem to fit."

"What size is it?" the toothy bloke replied.

Michael held the key an inch from his beady eyes and said, "I think it's, well, normal size. Or maybe a tad taller... Or, or, or... it might be a touch shorter..."

The bloke with the big teeth chuckled to himself as he strolled on wearing a grin which exposed his gnashers to - not only the town of MacNonsense where the hotel stood - but to the entire McMadness coast!

Michael Murphy sucked the key for luck. Every single brass tooth was wet with bubblegum saliva. But still it wouldn't penetrate the Yale. In and out just a few millimetres it thrust, before Michael had had enough! He paced backwards: three whole steps. Then... he focused. He concentrated so hard that his eyes began to water. A gush of tear-juice flooded his nasal area and trickled over his lips as the Murphy tongue - extending a whopping *nine inches* - collected it like a water-butt's downpipe. "Mmm," he mumbled, "salty! If only there was vinegar too. And chips. Mmmmm!"

BANG!

"Owwwch!"

The door didn't flinch.

Three more paces backwards, this time waterfall-free...

BANG!

"OWWWWWWWWWCH!"

Three more...

BANG!

"OWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWCH!"

It didn't budge an inch.

"This is no good. No good at all," he muttered, rubbing his left shoulder vigorously. "And I can't keep this up all day; A&E's miles away..."

* * * *

Back at reception, the young lady (just about recovered from her bubble blast experience) sneaked beneath her desk. The approaching sight gave her one hell of a fright!

"Hello, hello, it's me, it's me, Michael, Mr Michael Murph-eeeeee!" thrilled Michael, flying into the reception area like a drunken bullet. "But I can't stand on my hands at the moment to prove it. Not with this stuff shoulder."

No reply came.

"Hello," he billowed, spinning round to check he hadn't missed anybody.

The sight of a brunette wig bobbing up and down like a buoy in the sea suddenly caught his eye. He blinked. Then he winked. Up and down the *wig* bobbed - silently; and up and down on his Wellington toes he bounced - out of sync with it!

All of a sudden, the *wig* started to shift! To Michael's right it glided across the reception desk. Then, to the left it returned. Right, left, left, right it travelled, as Michael tiptoed in wonder. "The hair is on the move," he gasped. "I wish I knew earlier; I could've had a bet. Love me greyhound racing I do."

The hair kept going. In fact, it began to pick up speed! "I wish me key had worked; this wig is driving me barmy," he said, still welly-toeing. "And me feet are as sore as bare feet on the fire. How I wish I never fell asleep with three bars burning last winter..."

The wig slowed.

"All I wanted to do is relax on the bed and pop the boils on my bottom. My good pal Lance has taught me the best way. I even bought a king size box of Kleenex to mop up the gunge and..."

AT-CHOO!

"... and..."

AT-CHOOOOO!

"By gawd, did someone hear me talking about tissues?"

"Good afternoon," said the cheerful tone of the most ginger man the world has, probably, ever seen. So red-headed was he that he made carrots look albino. "I'm the manager, Melvin Pancake," he added, offering Michael his right hand.

"And I'm Michael Murphy, but I can't prove it yet," said Michael, shaking it with his left, still tip-toeing for no apparent reason.

"Is my receptionist pre-occupied?" continued Mr Pancake. "I have told Miss Cauliflower twice already - not to vacate her desk during her shift **without** ensuring cover is put in place."

"Does it rain much in here?" asked Michael.

"Pardon?" said Mr Pancake, eyebrows raised to the top of his egg-shaped face.

"Well, when it rains, at the cricket, you know, they put the covers on, so not to spoil the..."

"No, no, no. Oh, no. I simply meant..."

The now stationary *wig* immediately grew a head, neck and upper torso. "I'm sorry, Mr Pancake," said the wig head's lips. "I was, erm, well, I dropped my pen and was looking for it down here. How may I assist you, Mr Murphy, sir?"

"It's me key," replied Michael, revealing it from his trouser pocket. "It doesn't want to enter the hole. I think, maybe, it's a bit shy."

"Let me see," said Melvin, eagerly. "I wonder if the teeth are blunt..."

"Does it eat like us?" asked Michael, giggling.

"What room are you in, sir?" quizzed the manager, gawping at the key's head.

"I'm, umm, umm, errr... 66. That's the one."

"No, I'm afraid not," said Mr Pancake, detective style. "I think we now know what the trouble is."

"Trouble?"

"You are room... **99**, sir. This line underneath..."

"99?"

"Yes, 99, sir."

"I didn't hear the ice cream van."

"No, no, no. Oh, no. Look... Your room is number 99. Not - as you thought - number 66. I do hope that lock's not been bugged."

"What are you suggesting?" fired back Michael. "Dirty! Dirty talk indeed Mr Pancake. Flipping heck, I'm not that kind of chap!"

C

With naked feet and just a pair of Mr Men underpants to protect his private parts from, what he called "cheeky wasp stingies," Michael Murphy lay on his hotel bed in room 99, window wide open with the wall-hung television blaring. "I do like a good quiz show," he declared to himself. "I watch them all. You can't beat a good ole quiz. And if they're repeats, I have half a chance of getting a few right; even if I do say so myself."

"What is the current capital of The Netherlands?" the quiz host asked.

"Current? I didn't know they changed them," said Michael, scratching his messy hair in hope of help. "It's always been... T, surely... Any fool knows that!"

"The Hague," a gentleman with grey hair answered.

"Incorrect," replied the host, abruptly. "It's... Amsterdam!"

"Liar! Liar! Pants *and* pubies on fire! I don't give a damn anymore," Michael complained, thumping the remote control. "Lies, lies, lies, they flies, flies, flies all through the air. Right through the Earthly air. They're bleedin' **everywhere!**"

KNOCK

KNOCK

went his hotel room door.

"Who's there?"

"Bill," replied a deep, manly voice.

"I've paid my gas, I think. Electric too. Are you a bailiff?"

"I'm Bill. Bill Bundle. I'm a delivery man. Reception told me this is your room."

In his pants, Michael scurried across the carpet in desperation. "Can you hang on a mo?" he called. "Cos I can't."

The sound of liquid splashing forcefully into a pond filled the vicinity. "Ahhh! That's much better," he sighed - the flow beginning to slow. "That's my delivery done anyway!"

KNOCK

KNOCK

went the door again, this time harder.

"Who's there?" asked Michael, desperately rubbing the front of his Mr Men pants with an unused bog roll.

"Bill."

"Bill who?"

"Bill Gates!" the voice replied, sarcastically.

"Blimey," gasped Michael. "It's that computer man with the singing son. I hope he's not after me. I broke that Commodore 64 decades ago..."

Finally, at last, with a small yellowy tinge in his crotch area, Michael opened the door. "Oh my creepy, jeep, hide and seeky. Oh my gosh!" he gasped. "You're the tallest man I've ever seen!"

Bill was taller than the ceiling. He crouched and slouched and bent his head downwards which looked like a recipe for joint pain. "How tall are you?"

"I'm 8 foot something," Bill replied, clutching a small cardboard box like it was a football in the arms of a time-wasting goal-keeper. "I have a package for you, Mr Murphy."

"What is it?" asked Michael.

"It's difficult to say, being boxed like this, but..."

"Are you..."

"I'm Yodel."

"Yodel..."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure if you are."

"Well... Okay... YODELLLLLLLLL HEY-EEEEEE-EEEEEEEEEE!"

Backwards Michael flew onto his Mr Men backside as if a huge gust of wind with hurricane strength had hit him. "What are you doing, feller?" he asked, stroking his rump delicately. "You made me jump out of my skin! Why did you start performing opera like that? Bad opera it was, too. It sounded like Pavarotti and his Three Fivers with sore throats. I have a spare couple of blackcurrant Tunes if you fancy a suck?"

"You told me to!" responded Bill.

"I didn't even ask for one," said Michael, once again standing.

"Here, this is for you. Sign here," ordered the Yodelman. "I have over fifty deliveries left yet!"

"I hate cricket."

Michael signed the chap's electronic machine with the plastic pen attached and received the box - suspiciously.

D

"FRAGILE" the top of the box stated in bright red print. Michael stared at it hesitantly, like a snooker player does at a tricky pot. Coronation Street blasted from the telly as he thought about the very delicate situation. "That pub must be incredible," he said, scratching his chin. "The Rovers Return. They **all** go back for a reason. Must pull a nice pint in there. No doubt about it."

As Ken Barlow filtered into a depressive zone, Michael fished for a pair of scissors. "A-ha!" he thrilled, revealing a pair of pinking shears from his rucksack. "I think I'll trim my toenails first."

On the edge of the double bed Michael Murphy perched, his naked feet waiting to be operated on.

The *snips* started.

Snip

Snip

Snip

went the shears as slabs of hardened keratin darted through the air gracefully. Jim Bowen would've been chuffed.

"I wonder if other folk have nails like mine..." he asked himself, admiring the zig zag patterns proudly.

As the snips darted on, Michael's package began to feel neglected. Like a dusty tin of pink salmon at the back of a kitchen cupboard, or the bottle of Cockburn's Ruby Port on a J.D. Wetherspoon shelf - it wept. Invisible tears dripped from its cardboard lid as Michael snipped away - grossly engrossed! The invisible

tears started to turn the sides of the box soggy. Similar to Weetabix with too much milk - the sogginess sogged on, soggily.

Michael, almost finished, was oblivious to his package's sadness, and - instead of offering a Kleenex - burst into song:

"Me boils on me bum

Today I thought I'd shun,

And at the end of me cheesy feet

Pinking sheers decided to meet

And snip

snip

snip

I go!

A truly nail-biting show!

One small slip

From a dodgy snip

And pain, immense, would reign!

Oh nails, you're so dangerous,

Do not grow a-gain!"

Michael slipped his wellies back into place and with a *child-at-Christmas* smile upon his face, allowed the pinking sheers to do the business. "Box demolition, you must be done. I hope inside there'll be fun," he cheered - chopping maniacally!

E

"How am I supposed to know the numbers?" Michael complained - eyeballing the safe box. The combination lock was set at 0000. "I'm not Paul Daniels! How can I get inside? That Yodel bloke's a menace."

A black, metallic box, ten inches long and four inches deep - as well as six inches wide - sat on the bed, smirking!

Michael had shaken it and stood on it and tossed it against the wall - which peed off the person in the adjoining room, (but that's another story!) He had biffed it and bopped it and kicked it and dropped it (from his third floor window), which caused a fracas below. Who knew a saveloy and chips could create such havoc!

But the lid would not budge.

"There could be treasure inside," wondered Michael, aloud. "I could be the richest man in, in... in this hotel. If only I could open this bugger!"

Most randomly, as though somebody (perhaps Leatherface or Freddy Krueger) had injected his braincells with ideas - Michael yelled, "I NEED A SHARP, POWERFUL, BLADED TOOL! I wonder if B&Q's still open..."

On whipped his tweed trousers and Sesame Street t-shirt. A gold medal for dressing in a hurry would have been his - without doubt.

"I need something sharper than sharp," he said to the young lady at reception. "The sharper the better."

"My boyfriend's in the circus," she replied, thinking deeply. "He's always swallowing..."

"There's no need for that type of talk, Miss Cauliflower. That's personal informa..."

"Swords. He swallows swords. Very sharp ones. He practices each night before sipping his Bovril."

"Bovril?"

"Yes."

"Is that like Marmite in a mug?"

"It's beefy!"

"More friggin' cricket!" gasped Michael, glancing around. "To be fair, that Ian Botham is sound. Question of Sport was great with him and that Bill, the rugby player, as captains. Beefy Botham - a true sportsman in my eyes."

"Mr Murphy, I meant..."

ZERR!

"Everyone outside, quickly!" shrilled the receptionist, amid the **ZERRRRRRRRRR** racket. "It's the fire alarm!"

"Chef's burnt the sausages?" asked Michael.

A flurry of panic-stricken guests gushed into reception as the ZERRRRRRs zered on.

"I don't mind. A sausage well done is..."

"Outside please, Mr Murphy," pleaded Miss Cauliflower, all conversation of sausages evading her consciousness.

Outside the not-so-famous Boggdown Hotel, guests formed orderly (and some not-so-orderly) queues. A fat man with a beard coated in tomato ketchup shouted, "You swines! You'd better not bin my chicken and curly crispy chunky twisty fries. It was a **poultry** sized portion before I started!"

Michael stood at the back of the far left queue and stared at the man in front's bottom. "Excuse me, Mr Whippy," he said, poking the man's right shoulder, pretty aggressively.

"Yeah? What you want?" replied the bloke, who looked like a taller version of Phil Mitchell in a terribly foul mood. "I'm not serving any more today. The van's bugged."

"No, no, oh no, mister, I don't require your whippy. But I do like your '*Mr Whippy is the Best, Take the Whippy Tall Cone Test*' shirt. I just wondered... that pen-knife thingie attached to your low-hanging belt there... is it for sale?"

Mr Whippy withdrew the thingie from its strap and flicked open the knife. Then he examined the saw part. "Why?" he asked. "What you willing to pay?"

"I suppose, Mr Whippy," said Michael, "those knives, they can make quite a killing, but... I have a freshly expelled ten pound note here. And a few pieces of Hubba Bubba."

Whippy man studied the offer carefully - the gum hardest.

"It's un-blown," said Michael, proudly. "Un-chewed, too."

Glaring at his thingie mindfully, Whippy finally made a decision. "Okay, my friend, it's a deal. I'll sell it to you. As long as that bubblegum has never been blown!"

"Scout's honour," said a delighted Michael Murphy. "Cub's as well. And Beavers'. Even Girl Guides'!"

Cash and goods changed hands and after the fire drill headcount was complete, away he dashed - like an ostrich with diarrhoea. He sprinted so fast that sparks protruded from the soles of his wellies and lit a daydreaming chap's fag on the journey. "Thank you," the chap said, sucking joyfully. "I hate cigarettes," grumbled Michael, almost back to his room. "I went to the Cigarette Museum once and what a drag that was."

This time his key entered the lock and forced the pin tumblers upwards...

F

"Who the frickin' heck are you?!" shrieked Michael, skidding to a halt in his boots.

"Don," replied the stark naked man hopping about on his bed.

"Don who?"

"Don Caster. I'm proper Yarkshar, me."

"Get off my bed, you pervert!" yelled Michael, his cheeks turning red as tomatoes - extra ripe.

The nudey exhibitionist grabbed his nuts... a large packet of salted KP which was resting on the duvet - and legged it into the corridor.

"How did you get in?" Michael shouted, the room invader's bum ablur and his hairy back disappearing by the second. "This life is absolutely barmy. It's bonkers. It's crazy!"

A small card, partially crumpled, sat on Michael's pillow. It read: "NUDEST CONVENTION FOR BED-HOPPING LOST SOULS."

"What can one do? What can one do to live a normal life on this planet?" he muttered to himself, lifting it. "A quiet life I wish for me; from madness I wish to flee. If only someday I could be... For the love of nine carat goldfish... What is *that*?"

A long, slimy, dull green reptile with amber spots splattered randomly slithered into the ensuite and up the toilet pan. Over the rim it slid - down into the bowl.

"There's a deadly snake in me room!" panicked Michael, standing on his bed - twitching. "This place is a madhouse! It's nutty! The country's potty!"

The snake journeyed round the u-bend and was out of sight. "That's the last time I use that bog," he moaned, still twitching. "I don't want me arse nipped. No THANK you!"

The hours ticked by; the minutes too. And the seconds. A sheet of blackness lingered as the shadow of himself formed on his room's wall, lit by the moonlight. With all twitching ceased and the snake, probably, half way to the sewage works, Michael clambered off the bed and switched on the light. The box - weep-free - lay silent. "By Jimmy Tiddle, my reservoir of piddle... Wow! There really *is* a Lid!" he said, peering out the window.

Out came his newly acquired thingie and away he went! In manic sawing mode he rowed in style. Back and forth, up and down, his elbow grease expanding by the carton load. "By beastly bum fluff, me arms ain't half aching," he moaned as the metallic teeth of his three inch thingie saw gnawed at the combination lock. Screechy, gum-exposing sounds infiltrated the "oohs" and "aahs" from Michael's lips as the action played on, determinedly.

At twelve and 2/3 seconds past midnight... "HOORAY! HOORAH! HOORAH!" The lock gave way! His sweaty hands and bruised knuckles jiggled like Riverdance on acid. A sight for sore *and* crippled eyes it was. A sight for eyes poked with a flaming hot poker in fact.

As the lid sailed open, in the early hours of the morning, Room 99 of the Boggdown Hotel in Wish You Weren't Here's most featured holiday destination: The McMadness Coast, the loudest cry ears could detect filled the atmosphere like toxic turd fumes from the cubicle of the world's most prolific pooper: "NOOOOO! NOOOOO! WHY? WHY? WHY? I WANT MY MAMMY! I WANT MY MAMMY! I WANT ANYONE'S MAMMY! ANYONE'S MAMMY AT ALL!"

G

"Another bleedin' box," groaned Michael, staring at the discovery intensely. "Another box which has a lock!"

This time, the metal box wore a padlock. There was no combination to master! "A longer blade is what I need to destroy this chunky Chubb," he declared, scratching his hair scientifically. "But first, some shut eye."

He shut both his eyes and then resumed proceedings. It was tricky at first, so he reopened them. "Right, I think... those pinking shears could do the biz. Sharp as an aligator's tummy pleasers and shaped like a prop from the Texas Chainsaw Massacre..."

Off he went. Flakes of golden metal leapt from the scene like fleas as he worked the pinking shears dramatically. On and on he sheared with the shears as dawn approached. He knew this because his nostrils hoovered up bacon and egg and burnt toast wafts as he worked. His stomach gurgled. His forehead dripped like a doo-dah after a *door-bell's ringing* sprinkle.

PING!

It was free.

"Much easier than the last," he chuffed, his belly imitating a draining sink. "I don't belieeeeeve it!" he shouted, forcing the fry-up in his nostrils to vacate. "I do NOT BELIEVE IT!!!"

(Please note: Victor Meldrew can NOT sue for Michael's outburst above. For nobody owns words - not even that smart vowel and consonant lady, Carol Vorderman. At least, I don't think they do...)

"Another bleedin' box! I give up! I quit! I'm gonna throw this down the rubbish chute, if there is one," he rasped.

But he didn't. Instead, with his gurgles amplifying, off he dragged himself - to the dining hall, singing:

"Beans, beans, good for the heart

The more you eat, the more you fart!

Just a few I'd better eat

I can't sit on THAT toilet seat!"

H

Help-yourself, devour all you fancy buffets are value for money. If you're hungry. But half a farmyard on a plate scoffing puts many reasonable folk off. Especially those with hangovers.

Thankfully, Mr Michael Murphy, born and bred in Cork... sorry, York, was tea-total. He was totally against it! Growing up in York, this slender chap of average height moved to West London aged four. (Note to social services: HE WAS NOT ON HIS OWN AT THE TIME).

Aged seven, his family, comprising of his mum and dad and older stepsister Trace (who he's been trying to trace in recent years) and his pet ant - his wee ant, named, very creatively, Ant, who went everywhere with him - upped sticks to the Essex Riviera, also know as Clacton-on-Sea. And here I shall temporarily break away from the belly busting breakfast buffet scene and tell a backstory, which I hope you will read frontwards. Otherwise your eyes and brain will be terrifically tortured.*

* If you do happen to read this backstory backwards, please keep a cab company's number handy. It'll be quicker than phoning 999.

Michael's Ant, Ant

Michael owned a tiny ant

(Do large ones exist?)

It lived in a big glass tank,

BIG he did insist.

Michael said, "I'll name my ant

Ant! Yes, Ant the ant,

(Other names his brain could not

Think of - it was scant!)

Ant and Michael, what a pair

What a team they'd be;

Michael travelled everywhere

And so would wee he!

Into scraps at times they'd get

Ant would stare out hard,

If opponents lary got

"Step in-to our yard!"

Michael would say, confident,

"Ant, my pal here knows

Dec, and you'll be on the ground

With a weepy nose!"

(Anyway, back to the story!)

As saucy haricot after saucy haricot plummeted down his throat tunnel, Michael suddenly thought of a brilliant idea: "That Mr Bean got himself out of many a pickle. A whole jar of Branston in fact. I remember watching him do it. What a feller he was. Smart as they come. The only trouble I have is... where can I find a yellow mini..."

* * * *

Michael Murphy tied a knot, although he couldn't see it clearly. Truth be told, it was almost invisible. His crimson coloured Lada with seagull plop coated windows, was connected from its rear bumper to the handle of the third metallic box. And the handle, which was connected to the lid, was also connected with near invisible material - to the Boggdown Hotel car park's sole tree trunk. "Trunk to trunk," he chuffed, intelligently, as he sat in his motor, gripping the steering wheel in expectation. "I knew that dental floss would come in handy. Glad I packed it I am! Even Beany would be proud!"

Revvng the accelerator with the clutch depressed... off he sped, like a cork from a menacingly shaken bottle.

There was a sudden squeal as the brakes were slammed and an eager pair of eyes peered into the rearview mirror, hopeful yet expectant.

Out he leapt like a bum pinched by a scorpion; but it was no triumph. The box, sad and lonely, sat illegally in the car park - across the line of *two bays!* "Bugger!" he grumped, surprised that his peppermint tooth cleaning cord had failed him. "Perhaps something a bit stronger will work," he said, engineer-style as he scratched his left eyebrow. "Hmmm, now what can I find..."

After careful consideration he came to a decisive conclusion - "worms won't do. They'll explode. There'll be guts and worm juice everywhere. Neither will hair strands. They'd snap too easily. Plus, I don't wanna be a baldy, just yet... But the towrope in me boot, now that could do the trick. Yes! Yes! Of that I am confidently confident! Yes, yes, oh yes - the towrope it is..."

I

In Mr Bean style, Michael joined the rear bumper to the box handle and the box handle to the tree with the towrope. His hands tired as he knotted merrily but his hard work would surely pay off this time...

"Here we go

Box lid please

Open up -

Let me seize

All the contents

Stuffed away;

Then I'll dance

And cheer, 'Hooray!'"

As he sang his clutch was stamped on - hard. And the revs revved up, sending waves of fear through the coastal town of MacNonsense.

Then...

Then...

Off the duo roared: Michael Murphy and his battered and splattered Lada with a cloud which resembled the contents of a bulging hoover bag trailing behind.

"We've done it! We've done it! You beauty!" he thrilled, twisting his way towards the now, at long last, OPEN box! Like a tornado after five thousand cans of Red Bull he span in jubilation.

"Oh great skunk buttocks!" he groaned. "What on Uranus is this?"

To Michael's displeasure, the sight was not what he had imagined. His face scrunched up so wildly that he could have won gold at the World Gurning Championships. Like someone finding a pubic hair in their soup at the Ritz or some poor soul who discovers their rump steak hasn't actually come from a bull's rear end; even a Walkers cruncher who opens a modern packet to discover over half a dozen salt and vinegar crisps greeting him or her - the shock became overpowering. Far too great. Obscene to the extreme. And down he withered. Like a sunflower in Manchester* searching for a blob of brightness - he collapsed...

*other gloomy rain-infested places are available!

J

"Are you okay, Mr Murphy?" Miss Cauliflower asked, staring down at him grimly, as though he was *somewhere* at the bottom of the deepest well.

"Urahhh, errrra, urllll," he replied, lying on the concrete like a drunk after a **very heavy** session.

"What happened? Did you faint? Are you drunk? Have you got a medical condition? Do you require any specific medication, sir?"

"Ollalllll, eralllll, umble," Michael said.

"I'll phone for an ambulance."

"Nerrrrrumble."

"Pardon?"

"No, don't," said Michael, finally returning to his English tongue. "No 999. Don't phone please."

"Why not?" asked Miss Cauliflower, concerned.

"I can't stand it! I can't stand it! I never could! I never could!"

"You don't need to stand. Just lie still until it arrives."

"No! No! No! I hate it! I hate it! I hate it with a passion which I'll never, EVER ration! Those noises! Those blasted noises!"

"It's only the gardener strimming the hotel lawn, sir."

"No! No! No! Not that noise! It's the sirens! The sirens! They freak me out! They scare me silly!"

The receptionist, alarmed and confused, spoke not another word.

"You see, since I was a wee nipper in the Clacton Riviera, those whoo whoo noises, the type ambulances make, cause me to mess my drawers. I blame the old ghost train. It was terrifying. The whoo whoo whoos were extreme. Any resemblance and off I go. The bum gunk will flow."

NOTE: To cut a short story a tad shorter - no ambulance was called. 999 was not dialled. But Michael's drive had no yet failed...

"**Another** bleedin' box!" he cried, staring at the blue cube of metal. This time there was no lock at all: just a gold button on the flat lid which had the word "PUSH" engraved in swirling letters.

Michael pushed it.

Nothing happened.

The lid remained as sealed as an MP's lips at an Honesty Conference.

He pushed it again.

This time a voice beamed out from the base, echo-like. "YOU ARE BOXING CLEVER," it said.

Once more Michael pushed, and the echoey machine voice regurgitated: "YOU ARE BOXING CLEVER."

"Who is this Clever chap? And where am I to fight him?" asked Michael, blinking rapidly.

"You are a genius," replied the box. "Cleverer than clever. Smarter than all the Chasers and Eggheads and Mastermind winners combined. You make Mensa look stupid."

"Why, thank you," Michael said, a little smugly.

The box, resting on his lap as he slouched in the armchair in room 99, then concluded: "A pair of boxing gloves awaits; ask the barman at the Bruno Arms for a sneaky punch. It's truly delicious."

Michael Googled the address and after dismissing search findings regarding Frank Bruno, finally found the pub.

Off he sprinted like a bolt. Not Usain, but a rusty gate bolt which was too lazy to budge. In his tweed trousers he achieved the 100 metres in not sub 10 seconds but 10 minutes; but arrive he did - breathless and sweaty and ready for a nice cool pint! "Limeade, please," he asked the big-nosed barman with a nasal drip. "And, oh yes, also a... yes, that's it... a sneaky punch."

He fished about for change in his trouser pockets and, to be fair, didn't see it coming...

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"My friggin' nose! It's all wonky!" he mumbled, being helped onto a bar stool by a lady with a purple rinse and a man with B.O. so bad that it could defeat any nuclear weapon in war.

A pint, (no, correct that, seven pints of limeade later), with glowing green eyes Michael was ready to *try again...*

"A sneaky punch," he asked the barman, crouching below the bartop . "A sneaky punch, as I have been told to ask..."

"Ahhh!" delighted the barman, still nasal dripping. "You should've said so earlier. I'm awfully sorry about your hooter. Do you require any further sheets of toilet tissue?"

"No, no, oh no, " replied Michael. "Just the gloves, please."

A fluffy pair of pink mittens were revealed from beneath the bar. "Oh..." gurgled the barman, cheeks as red as a postbox. "Sorry; these are my Auntie Lorna's! I'll return them to her tomower! Hahaha! Get it? Auntie Lorna, tomower..." As a few ripply groans penetrated the ether, once more he ducked beneath the bartop and this time... WOW! Fit for not only a rumble in the jungle, but a fight ANY day or night - a pair of smooth, black, professional boxing gloves emerged. Tyson Fury would have been excited!

The barman passed the gloves to Michael, who slipped them on eagerly. "Now, where is this Mr Clever who I'm supposed to be boxing? he asked, openly.

No answer followed.

"Mr Clever, Mr Clever, where art thou?" he added, confidently.

Still the airwaves hung in silence.

"Mr Clever, Mr Clever, where are you?" he rambled, impatiently, amid slurps and glass knocks. Then he pretended to box smart - beating up the empty space all around him!

"Mr Clever?" a deep voice questioned. "Mr Clever? Mr Hargreaves is not in the building. Roger has sadly, departed.

All of a sudden, a MASSIVE bloke the size of Giant Haystacks and Big Daddy multiplied by a baker's dozen waddled in through the main entrance. Glasses smashed and hearts stopped at the ghastly, surreal sight. Crisps were crunched more slowly and bags of peanuts plummeted to the carpet in shock. And then the bell rang...

"I'm Mr Clever," revealed the enormous man - showing his table-sized hands to the patrons.

"Ler-lar-last oar-oarr-orders," stumbled the barman, his arms flapping like a bird with Super-glued wings, cornered by a cat.

"I'm boxing Clever," declared Michael, glancing at the pubgoers in proud-hope.

Mr Clever, wearing gloves the size of extra-large sleeping bags grinned. As he did so, his teeth - as yellow as the inside of a bunged up ear channel - boasted. And little pieces of (what looked like) lettuce jiggled with enthusiasm. Between each molar the green leftovers danced.

"I don't want any trouble in here," stated the barman, pouring himself a quadruple Scotch - his fourth in as many minutes. "Happy Hour begins tomorrow. Let's all be friends!"

"No boxing match then..." sulked Mr Clever, sniffles invading his conk which was as squashed as a sultana sat on by the biggest bottom imaginable.

"This whole trip has been a DISASTER! A DAY OF NUTTYNESS! A WACKY BACCY SEND-ME-DOOLALLY experience and three quarters!" announced Michael, looking up at Mr Clever's head which was closer to the Moon than the bartop! (Apology offered: this is a slight exaggeration.) "I wish I never entered that blasted competition now. The strip was a waste of a gold 'un!"

"What competition?" asked the barman, swaying from side to side like a mast on a ship on the fierce Pacific waves.

"The raffle!" snapped Michael, studying the ginormous gloves with incredible determination. "The raffle at Ellie's!"

"Who the freaking heck's Ellie?" said Mr Clever, sniffing his left armpit like a dog sniffs another dog's backside.

"Ellie Ayke. Ellie Ayke the owner of Ellie's Cafe. She persuaded me after she caught me daydreaming at a bloke's bacon bap."

The atmosphere became as silent as a library full of mutes turning electronic pages on their tablets. You could cut the tension with a butter knife; even a feather duster. The anticipation was tremendous - similar to the entrance of a bride down the aisle...A

"I only popped in for a Gut Buster," Michael went on, thinking, hungrily. "Bacon; egg; tomato; shrooms; baked beans; black pudding; fried bread; sausage! It should've been called a Bog Buster to be honest. It busted mine up badly; that's for sure!"

"WHAT ABOUT THE COMPETITION?!" shouted a small feller with a face full of wrinkles so profound that no iron in the world could flatten them.

"Hang on!" replied Michael, still in hunger thought.

"Sod *on!* I'll hang *you* in a minute of you don't get on with it!" answered the wrinkled heckler. "I've got a dirty weekend in Bath booked for next month!"

"Well," said Michael Murphy, half smiling and half frowning. "Ellie Ayke said the winner of the raffle would win a prize."

"WHAT PRIZE?!" pleaded Mr Clever, now on his oak trunk sized knees. "Please get on with it before the next Millennium!"

"I won!" thrilled Michael. "'A Mystery Boxing Day treat' she told me. To be truthful, I did wonder why it was *this* early..."

"If you took any longer it would've been Boxing Day," squealed the big-nosed barman, supping a Babycham from its bottle.

"Anyway," continued Michael more cheerfully. "Anyway... Well... Anyway... At least the weather's turned out nice."

"It's LASHING DOWN!" replied a soaked newcomer, angrily. "My broolly's even gone on strike!"

The End

P.S.

A note from the author: **LA!**

