

Snatched (!)

hey what are you doing!

by

the

L-i-v-i-n-g



Dead!!!!!!

by

David Sheskin

WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes... David Sheskin's, "Snatched by the Living Dead," is a referential romp, a story that allows it audience to both laugh (find meaning) and be entertained (find joy) – bemused may be appropriate here as well. What really works in Sheskin's piece is its smooth and casual command of the tale. Bus Tar Pilkington is a rockstar, a man whose fandom is only rivaled by his nonchalance, and a man apparently noticed enough by both the famous undead and the Post Office to merit a cultural conversation. Sheskin takes an extraordinary story and tells it with such a conversational tone that the reader is more than willing to go along for the ride – sort of an Owen Wilson in *Midnight In Paris* meets rock*

stardom & Fargo; a reverse Miniver Cheevy. Oftentimes in simplicity comes perfection, in the wanderlust there is a path, in the humor a depiction of the truth, in sarcasm there may be satire, and with threats against kittens there will always be vengeance. Sherskin's, "Snatched by the Living Dead," works because you want to pay attention, you want to see where the lines lead, you want to play audience to the production being put on before you, you want this narrator's tale to keep going – if not for the realism then for the love of a suspended belief. Enjoy

Five Stars

QUALITY QUOTABLE (for the love of language...)

Meanwhile, Dr. Einstein pulled a watch from his vest pocket and informed me that the group would be taking a trip, and that before we left I'd better go to the bathroom because there weren't any rest stops scheduled along the way. But just as he was telling me this I heard a commotion in the kitchen, and turned around to see Woodrow Wilson making everybody sandwiches with yesterday's left over chicken salad. As he was doing this, Peewee, my little shorthair cat who's always been partial to chicken, was pulling on Woodrow's shoelaces with his sharp little teeth. I'll be damned if that old pacifist from Princeton didn't lose his temper and swat my kitty cat with a 1920's edition of the *New York Times*.

Snatched by the Living Dead

Last Tuesday night when I got home I found Albert Einstein and Maureen Connolly (who, if you don't know, won three consecutive Wimbledon singles titles in the 1950s) having sexual intercourse in my bed. When I came into the bedroom the two of them got real shook up — blushing, covering up their private parts with hands, sheet, and anything else they could find lying around my pad. Heck, it was just like they had no idea that someone besides themselves might happen to have the key to the place. Anyway, I said, "Be cool kids, what you're doing is beautiful and I'm gonna go back outside and hustle down to the local *Seven-Eleven* to get us a few things to nibble on, and when I get back the three of us can have a nice little chat." But before I could leave, old Albert pulls some sort of laser gun from out under the bed and with one

blast the thing knocks me unconscious.

When I came to, which according to the clock on my night table was a good hour and a half later, Ms. Connolly was standing over me holding a tennis racket in her right hand. Since I'd read lots of sporting books, as well as seen most every one of them old-time newsreels, I damn well knew the lady could handle a racket. Anyway, it didn't take me long to realize that by then more than a few additional bodies were abusing my hospitality. For starters, my stereo was on full blast, and none other than Isadora Duncan was perched on top of my kitchen table doing the third act of *Swan Lake*. The lady was bare from the waist up, and I was starting to get kind of worried because squatting on the floor drooling over her bobbing boobies were Woodrow Wilson and Babe Ruth. I figured that it was time for me to speak up. So, I said to Ms. Connolly, "Look it's cool with me if you and your crew want to crash here for a few days, but I'd sure appreciate it if the bunch of you kept things down as my landlord don't take too kindly to people partying past midnight." The lady just looked at me with a sneer.

Meanwhile, Dr. Einstein pulled a watch from his vest pocket and informed me that the group would be taking a trip, and that before we left I'd better go to the bathroom because there weren't any rest stops scheduled along the way. But just as he was telling me this I heard a commotion in the kitchen, and turned around to see Woodrow Wilson making everybody sandwiches with yesterday's left over chicken salad. As he was doing this, Peewee, my little shorthair cat who's always been partial to chicken, was pulling on Woodrow's shoelaces with his sharp little teeth. I'll be damned if that old pacifist from Princeton didn't lose his temper and swat my kitty cat with a 1920's edition of the *New York Times*. Now, pushing me around was one thing, but hitting a helpless pussycat was something else. So, President or no President, I began to cuss out Mr. Wilson and walked over to him with a clenched fist. But before I could get my

hands on him the Babe got me is some humongous bear hug, and I must have passed out, because the next thing I knew it was two and a half hours later, and the whole group was stuffed into my vintage 1982 Volkswagen Beetle tearassing down the New Jersey Turnpike head for God knows where. As for me, I was sandwiched in the back seat between the two ladies. Up front were President Wilson, the Babe and Einstein. And if that wasn't enough, the driver of the vehicle happened to be Sally Ann Ochansky, an old girlfriend of mine who'd been deceased for sixteen years. In 2004 Sally Ann, along with three other teenie boppers, cashed in her chips on that same turnpike when she rammed her Pontiac Firebird into a bridge abutment somewhere between Jersey City and Bayonne. I was the only body to come out of that little gig alive, and to this day I still have a gimpy knee and a bad bite to prove that behind the wheel of a car Sally Ann has no peer. Because the lady was driving like a bat out of Hell, and because I knew that no amount of cajoling on my part would persuade her to slow down, I just took a few deep breaths and hoped that what was happening to me was just one extra bad, extra-long dream, or acid trip, or something else that goes on when a person isn't fully conscious.

About the time we hit Maryland, Babe Ruth decided he wanted to play *Twenty Questions*. With a big shit eating grin on his face he turned around, and in a raspy voice asked everybody, "What do W. C. Fields, Lajos Kossuth, and Carl Sandburg have in common?"

After a few minutes, during which time most of the group snickered but didn't say a damn thing, I figured I might as well give it a stab. So, I told the Babe, "Seeing that everyone else is stumped, I'm gonna give it a crack. How about all three of them having their faces on U. S. commemorative stamps?"

I'll be damned if the man's lower jaw didn't drop all the way down to his balls. No way he'd figured that a mortal like me would come up with the right answer. But being the competitor he

was, he came back right away with, “Okay Mr. know-it-all, tell me the only foreigner who is not from England or France who has his face on two U. S. stamps.”

I said, “What’s in it for me if I tell you?”

Grinning, he said, “It’s more like what happens if you don’t tell me. Come up with the wrong answer and we have your cat for supper.”

Now that he’d brought it up, I could hear the little bugger meowing up a storm somewhere up front. As near as I could figure they had Peewee stashed away in the trunk. So, here was this big burly guy who could hit a baseball a ton. This bag fat softie who supposedly was a sucker for every kid who ever pulled on his pinstripes. And if I didn’t answer his friggin question he was going to make sure everybody had my cat for supper.

I looked at him and said, “You may be in the *Hall of Fame* Mr. Ruth, but as far as I’m concerned the only hall you’re fit to be in is the *Hall of Shame*. And by the way, the answer to your question is Sun Yat-sen.”

At two A.M. we passed through Baltimore. Everybody was getting a little shut eye except for me, and, of course, Peewee who was making all sorts of awful noises in the trunk. Naturally, Sally Ann was awake too, and was driving me positively nuts clicking on a piece of gum that she’d been chewing on ever since we’d left New York. Those last couple of hours with everything quiet had set me to thinking real hard about exactly what was going on. All in all, it had the makings of a kidnaping. And why not? After all, I was Bug Tar Pilkington, the hottest rock star on this side of the sun. So what if I gave most of my money to charity and lived the simple life with the common folk in the Bronx. My record company had me insured for ten million big ones and according to *Rolling Stone Magazine* I was a national treasure.

So, when we pulled into Washington D. C. at three A. M., and the bunch of us signed into

connecting suites at a *Holiday Inn*, that just happened to have Will Rogers working behind the desk and Charles Lindbergh as the chief bellhop, I laid my cards on the table.

“Okay, “ I said to Einstein, who seemed to be the leader of the pack, “How much ransom you gonna ask for to set me free?”

Old Albert didn’t say a word. All he did was to snap his arthritic old fingers, and in a flash the rest of the crew set up a pup tent in the middle of one of the rooms, and stuffed me and my cat inside it. The only one who said anything to me was the Babe who tossed me the latest edition of *Scott’s Catalog of American Postage Stamps* and suggested, “Study up real hard music man, because about suppertime I’m gonna ask you the \$64,000 question.”

As it was, I could pretty much see and hear what was going on outside the tent. Miss Isadora Duncan, in her fine English, was making a bunch of phone calls, informing the parties at the other end of the line that yours truly was being held for ransom, and that in the near future conditions for his release would be published. As for the rest of the group, they were seated on the floor in the lotus position chanting mantras and making ransom notes by cutting up newsprint.

“Jesus,” I thought, “I really am in one hell of a fix. Holed up with a pussycat inside of an army surplus tent in some godforsaken *Holiday Inn* run by the *Living Dead*.” To make matters worse, in a little more than 48 hours I was due at the Staples Center in LA for a concert, and in the 14 years I’d been in the business I’d never missed, let alone ever been late for a gig.

Just as I was getting real depressed, the Babe poked his oversized body in the tent and said, “It’s time for the \$64,000 question. What American songbird is about to be memorialized on a 25 cent green commemorative stamp? I’ll even give you a hint. It ain’t a mockingbird or a thrush.”

Of course, I knew the answer to his question, but, all in all, I’d had my fill of his silly little

games. So, I just looked at him and said, “Tell me Mr. Sultan of Swat, how does this little gig compare with that homer you hit against the Cubbies in 1932? You know, the one you pointed to the bleachers just before you hit it?”

From the look the man gave me you could tell he wasn't used to any backtalk. But all he did was to give me the finger and then rejoin the rest of the group, who by then were debating the merits of cutting off one of my ears or maybe a finger or two or maybe even my pecker, and mailing it to the *New York Times* in order to convince everybody that they meant business. Old Woodrow was the most vocal of the group. Perched on a coffee table, just like it was one of them soapboxes he used during his campaign days, he screamed that I was nothing more than a wise assed pothead, and that it didn't matter much what they did with me so long as they got their point across.

As it was, the Babe's last question had finally put things in perspective, and I'd pretty well figured out why I was being held hostage. For starters, the group wasn't exactly thrilled that a dude like me was making a million plus buckaroos a year, and that certain people saw fit to write books about me, as well as putting me in a movie of my own life story, when, according to them, the only thing I'd accomplished during my 30 plus aimless years of existence was to get high a lot and screw every able bodied filly who had blond hair and big boobs. The thing though that really bugged them was that the day had come when the likes of me was about to be immortalized on postage stamps and dollar bills. The Babe bellowed that God knew the bunch of them and lots of other lesser known souls like them had paid their dues, and, for the most part, by modern day standards had lived a clean and decent life. Yet, with all that, it wasn't until 35 years after he'd met his maker that *he* finally made the postage stamp scene. Of course, Maureen Connolly and a lot of other good people still hadn't gotten that far, and except for President

Wilson (who sure as hell had paid his dues, and, because of it, deserved having his face plastered on three American stamps, as well as on a \$100,000 dollar bill and a \$500 Savings bond), not a one of them had made the currency scene. And it was common knowledge that the Postmaster General had just announced that the government was coming out with a commemorative set on contemporary music, and that among those who were going to be immortalized on stamps were Janis Joplin (who just happened to be that American songbird who was going to be on a 25 cent green), Kurt Cobain, and yours truly Bug Tar Pilkington. So far as he was concerned, it was sick enough to put dead scum like Joplin and Cobain on postage stamps, let alone break with tradition, and stick on someone like me who was alive and kicking. Then Einstein got up and declared that he'd never been one to go off the deep end, but as far as he was concerned the straw that had broken the camel's back was the announcement by the Secretary of the Treasury the week before that, come springtime, they'd be coming out with an Elvis Presley half dollar and a Mama Cass three dollar bill! So, what it all came down to was that I was going to be the fall guy — just because I could carry a tune and every once and a while a body liked to get a little high.

Anyway, the Babe finally got around to telling everybody that I'd gotten snappy with him a few minutes before, and in his opinion it was time to teach me a lesson. The bunch of them, except Albert, who definitely was the moderate of the group, gave the go-ahead sign, and since the majority ruled, the Babe and Woodrow dragged me out of the tent and laid my head on the coffee table just like it was a chopping block. The Babe told Isadora Duncan to remove her sweater and do the *Dance of the Seven Veils*. Then, he said to me, "If you stay real still and keep your eyes on her titties, the lady will make a clean cut."

The lady was Ms. Maureen Connolly who was standing over me holding a sword above her

head just like she was about to serve for championship point at Wimbledon. From where my head rested, it appeared that she was intent on cutting off my right ear. So, saying a few Hail Marys, I closed my eyes and waited for the guillotine to fall. But all of a sudden I heard a loud blast of music — the sort one hears in those old movies when the cavalry is making its charge — and opening my eyes I saw Sally Ann Ochansky, Peewee, and a bunch of awful familiar looking faces storming into the room. Leading the pack, my kittycat torpedoed Ms. Connolly from behind, digging his sharp little teeth into her calves. Unfortunately, before the lady dropped to her knees her sword came down grazing my head and snipping off most of my nose. The next thing I knew I was all bloody, in a daze, flat on my back witnessing the most God-awful rumble I'd ever seen.

Janis Joplin was stomping on Woodrow Wilson's glasses with one foot and kicking him in the groin with the other. Elvis Presley and Kurt Cobain were pounding on the Babe's head and belly with oversized electric guitars. Jim Croce had Einstein in a headlock, and Mama Cass, Jimi Hendrix and good old Sally Ann Ochansky were mopping up the rest of the crew with their fists or whatever furniture they could lay their hands on.

Needless to say, the *Living Dead* got theirs. It seems that Sally Ann Ochansky turned out to be one of the great cat lovers of the western world. She hadn't minded all that much what the *Living Dead* was doing to me, but the fact that they were abusing my cat and threatening to do worse had finally gotten to her. The clincher came when she was listening to the radio and happened to hear a medley of Bug Tar Pilkington's greatest hits, and, among other things, had heard me sing a cute little ditty I'd written back in 2007 called *Sally Ann's Blood Slumber Party on the New Jersey Turnpike*. It kind of made her all teary eyed and think back to the old days before she'd gone and racked up that car and spoiled the sweet thing we had going between us.

Anyway, she figured it took a special kind of person to write a ballad about a broad who broke just about every bone in his body, and, because of it, Sally did an about face and dragged her ass back to the hereafter to fetch the cavalry. Now that it's all over, all I can say is that if you're one of them people who's never heard of me and wants to know what Bug Tar Pilkington looked like once upon a time when he had himself a nose, just go to your post office and buy a 55-cent chocolate stamp that has my likeness printed on it.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *One day I got the idea to write an off-the-wall type of story about a celebrity kidnapping and came up with this piece which kind of defies categorization. I've been writing fiction for longer than I can remember and over the years I've come up with an abundance of ideas and stylistic techniques that in part I attribute to my being a voracious consumer of fiction and nonfiction written by both well-known and unknown authors.*

AUTHOR BIO: David Sheskin's work has been published in numerous magazines over the years. Most recently he has appeared in The Dalhousie Review, The Satirist, Shenandoah and Chicago Quarterly Review. His most recent books are David Sheskin's Cabinet of Curiosities and Outrageous Wedding Announcements.