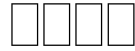


# Whatever Became of . . .

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(me myself and I hey what happened)

By

Lawrence Du **K**ore

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes... Lawrence DuKore's, "Whatever Became of Me?" is like Memento without the tattoos or Shutter Island without the bad writing, or Mulholland Drive without David Lynch (Naomi Watts doesn't masturbate, but "Llorando," may quietly drift over you as you watch the events unfold). Whether or not those similes work for you, DuKore's work focuses on a man who wakes up with no memory of how he got to where he currently is and has no idea of what's happened to the life he remembers – he is unable to validate the only memories he can seem to muster. What I like most about this story is the ability to capture one of the most important aspects of our natures: the other. When there is no trail of crumbs to follow trying to figure out what has become of someone, when the present has no foundation and the future doesn't offer many clues, the consolation we have for lack of surety exists in some coffee, some apple pancakes, and a woman named Polly to ask how you're doing. Good or bad, to figure out what became of you, it always helps to have an audience agree you're there. Nice work*

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

I had a major pre-pubescent crush on Juanita. The neighborhood rumor had it that she'd been kidnapped by extra terrestrials or maybe it was something more mundane like moving to Sacramento. Anyway, I walked across their lawn and rang their bell. Instant chimes! A pleasant sound. A reassuring sound. The front door opened and a pleasant middle aged lady looked at me. It was a defensive look. Maybe I looked like a bum, a panhandler or something worse.

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**WHATEVER BECAME OF ME?**

a story by

Lawrence DuKore

I woke up in a field of bright red poppies. I didn't know what I was doing there. I didn't know I'd been there. But there I was. I had good childhood memories of this particular poppy field but I was never in the habit of falling asleep in it. My memories had to do with a certain young lady named Juanita Higgins but that didn't explain what I was doing there, fully clothed or at least as fully clothed as one could be in a bright Hawaiian shirt, faded blue jeans and sandals. Sandals? I never wore sandals and it struck me as odd that I was wearing them now but then again, all those waking moments were odd! I did not have my house keys, my car keys or my office keys, which was also peculiar. I kept feeling around like I was a cop frisking myself and sure enough I also did not have my wallet. I did have a thick wad of bills – which was a temporary relief. A further examination revealed that I also did not have my watch, a gift from my kids and that disturbed me greatly.

From the position of the sun, I figured it was still early morning. I stood there for the longest time, trying without success to let the sun relax my body. A warm breeze was a temporary relief as were the sight and smell of the flowers but nothing could stop my heart from beating too strongly. I was hyperventilating as I thought of my kids. I hoped they were okay. I wondered where they were at that moment. Roger, my six years old, was always wandering away at the beach and Joseph, the nine years old big brother played his role to perfection. But what role was I playing? And what was the play?

Standing there in the poppy field, stretching my body, scratching my head, looking around at what seemed to be a sleepy ghost town in a summer heat, I figured I should go home but where the hell was home? I had to concentrate really hard to remember the street and the house where I lived. No, no, no. Where was the street and the house where we lived? Was there a “we?” Was Juanita Higgins part of the “we?” I didn't have a clue.

When a few cars and vans went by, I felt better. The drivers did look familiar. The homes also looked familiar. And because the air was fresh and the sun felt good on my face as it shone through the pine trees, I almost felt relaxed – almost – except that now I wasn't sure if I lived on George Street or Queen Anne Street. A moment later, it hit me that George and Anne were the names of my folks. Then I knew I was really in trouble; big trouble.

I crossed the street and began walking, hoping that my head would automatically fill in the blanks, like I was on remote. Suddenly I saw the little white house on the corner and the street sign that read “Jensen Street.” I began to breathe more easily. God bless my remote! I breathed more easily. I felt even better as I ran along the shaded, tree-lined streets, almost losing my sandals along the way. Now I was on the porch. Now I grabbed the handle of the front door. It was locked.

“Joey, get out here!”

I waited. I listened for the sounds of running steps. I listened for voices.

“Roger, are you in there? It’s your daddy.”

I knocked on the door. I pounded on the door. I rang the bell.

“Sophie, are you in there?”

Sophie was the name of our beloved Briard, our big, blonde, lovable French sheep dog. She was the star of the family. Sophie treated all of us as if we were sheep, herding us, making sure that we walked together, at least on those occasions when the family was together. When I would come home from work, she would be inside the house, scratching at the door. And when I opened the door, her paws were on my shoulders and she was licking my face. But there was no barking dog. Sophie was gone. My children were gone. And maybe their mother, whomever she was, had been gone for a long time. Maybe they’d all been gone for a long time? Maybe I’d been gone for a long time?

I stood there on the porch, asking myself questions that didn’t have answers.

“Higgins! The Higgins lived next door. Juanita lived next door.”

But then I realized that Juanita had disappeared a long time ago. I had a major pre-pubescent crush on Juanita. The neighborhood rumor had it that she’d been kidnapped by extra terrestrials or maybe it was something more mundane like moving to Sacramento. Anyway, I walked across their lawn and rang their bell. Instant chimes! A pleasant sound. A reassuring sound. The front door opened and a pleasant middle aged lady looked at me. It was a defensive look. Maybe I looked like a bum, a panhandler or something worse.

“Excuse me, I said. “I live next door. I seem to have misplaced my family. Or maybe I’ve misplaced myself. My name is Jordan Hall. I wonder if you can help me. The Higgins family used to live here. They were my neighbors. Did you know them/ Do you know me?”

She looked at me oddly. I continued, trying to be reassuring.

“I know I must sound like a weirdo. I know I must look like a weirdo. But do you know me? Do you know my family. I have a wife and two children; a son and a daughter. Listen, if I’m not making any sense to you, I’ll go to the police. But please stop staring at me. It’s not like I’m some kind of extra terrestrial.”

The woman continued to stare at me. Then she turned away and began to close the door but not before mumbling, “My husband and I have been living here for going on three years. That house next door was empty when we moved in.”

Three years? Really? Where had I been for the past three years?

She gave me a pitying look and quickly closed the door. I started to walk away without knowing where I was walking to but then I stopped at the first street corner, realizing that I had no answers whatsoever and that I’d better go to the police. I waited at the street and began to laugh. It might have been an hysterical laugh because there was no traffic. And then – suddenly – there was traffic – as if I was waking from a dream. A bike whizzed by with the biker hunched over as he was racing in the Tour de France. Why did I say “he?” Maybe it was a “she?” The biker had a helmet, which hid the gender. Why did I care? Then a few joggers past me, each one looking smug and healthy. They seemed to know where they were going. My immediate urge was to follow them but then I realized that I could never keep up. It also hit me that I didn’t know how old I was or how long I’d been in this precarious position; this dangerous state. I had to get to a police station. I needed directions. A traffic sign indicated that I was on Main Street. Good! Definitely helpful to be on any main street. I began walking. After a few blocks, I saw what was definitely a coffee shop; a pristine, all white shop with a sign over the window that said, “Hoppers.” The name didn’t ring a bell but so what? I figured that maybe someone inside could help me. Maybe somebody would recognize me.

I opened the door and stepped inside. Nobody looked familiar. Nothing about the place looked familiar. It was just another coffee shop. I sat down at the counter and watched a boy cleaning it, wiping it, then looking up and smiling at me.

“How’re you doing?” he said. The boy looked like he could have been my son.

“I’ve had better days,” I answered as he kept on wiping the counter. “I think I’ll sit over by the window.”

“Be my guest,” he said.

“Smart ass kid,” I thought as I looked at all the empty booths and quickly sat down at the nearest one, facing the door. I was hoping that somebody would enter, somebody who would call out my name. If only I had a wallet ... but I didn’t have a wallet or any identifying cards. And I didn’t have my phone., I kept patting my pockets, hoping that a phone or a business card would magically appear.

“Hello. My name is Polly. How may I help you?”

The waitress was unsmiling but at least she identified herself. She had a name. That was a good beginning. I asked her if there was a men’s room.

“Of course we have a men’s room. It also doubles as a lady’s room. Make a right turn past the counter. You can’t miss it. Would you like to order first?”

And suddenly I was hungry. Suddenly this human contact turned off my panic button. Polly was now my best friend.

“I’ll have the blueberry pancakes and coffee.”

“We’re out of blueberry. How about apple?”

“You got a deal, Polly.”

I was smiling as I stood up and headed for the men’s room. Polly smiled at me. It wasn’t a personal smile or an intimate smile. It wasn’t a boy-girl smile like in the movies. But it was contact; human contact. I hurried to the men’s room and looked at myself in the mirror. Somehow I knew I’d be in for a shock and I was right. I sneaked a look at myself as if I was a Peeping Tom. The middle-aged man looking back at me was balding, unshaven and desperately in need of those apple pancakes. I buried my face in the basin and threw warm water on my face. I combed my hair back with fingers. I did not recognize myself.

“You okay in there?”

The voice was Polly’s.

“Yeah. Thanks for asking. I’ll be right out.”

I returned to my window seat. A cup of coffee was waiting for me and it might have been the best cup of coffee I’d ever tasted. Several minutes later, Polly hurried back to my table and placed a stack of pancakes on the table. She waited for my reaction. I felt the tears on my face.

“You okay, mister?”

I considered telling Polly the story of my life; the brief story of my life. I needed to tell someone. I needed to make sense out of something that was senseless. But first I needed another cup of coffee and I needed to eat those apple pancakes. I was very – very -hungry.

**The End**

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *I'm at an age (approaching 90 years old) when I'm forgetting "things" like why I broke up with a long time lady friend or several off Broadway productions as an actor. Most of my long life has been as a novelist, screenwriter and playwright. Just as actors are or should be silent about their artistic choices in a performance, I feel strongly that writing about why I wrote WHATEVER BECAME OF ME takes away from the subtext. To forget details of one's existence is a frightening prospect. The reader should be the frightened one.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** As a very young screenwriter, Lawrence DuKore began his writing career with the Richard Pryor film, GREASED LIGHTNING, which was produced by Hanna Weinstein for Warner Bros. His television play, A MISTAKEN CHARITY was produced by Lindsay Law for PBS/American Playhouse and was nominated for a Writers Guild of America award for best dramatic writing. He is a member of both the HB (Herbert Berghof/Uta Hagen) Playwrights Foundation and the Actors Studio Playwrights/Directors Workshop. Most recently, his play, STAINED GLASS, premiered off-Broadway at the award-winning Metropolitan Playhouse. And his Latino comedy, SUNSHINE, just had a successful 3 week run off off Broadway at Teatro LATEA.

· Writings;PLAYS

· Virgin Territory, Actors Studio, New York City.

· The Emperor of My Baby's Heart, New York City, 1984.

· Writings;SCREENPLAYS

· Greased Lightning, Warner Brothers, 1977.

· Writings;TELEPLAYS; EPISODIC

· "A Mistaken Charity," American Playhouse, PBS, 1987.

· Writings;SERIES

· One Life to Live, ABC, 1979.

· Search for Tomorrow, NBC, 1984.