

Editor of the Doleful Countenance

A Humorist's Quixotic Quest

In an aging rust belt town in Connecticut, the name of which I don't care to remember, there dwelt the editor-in-chief of a once-glorious humor publication. Back in the day, this magazine rivaled the daily paper in circulation and giant vats sloshing with dubious Champagne punches graced its every social function. But of late, the broadsheet was run out of a tiny third-floor walkup on Crown Down and as for the vats of liquor—well, let's just say Captain Jack and Commandant Popov more often than not frequented the get-togethers.

And who was the helmsman of this ship of fools? Middling stature, orangish complexion, watery eyes, thinning hair, tremulous voice, chronic cough, ink-stained fingers, rumpled clothes—in short, that nebulous type who awkwardly stands in the corner cracking jokes until he happens onto a position of power. His family name was Lau, or Au, or maybe Kan—there is a measure of disagreement among those in the know—but for our purposes, it matters not. Suffice it to say that this fellow—the Editor, as we may call him—spent all his time holed up in his room eating Tostitos and muttering to himself. And reading—most of all written humor in all its forms: leaflets, pamphlets, compilations, anthologies, best-ofs, top-tens, dialogues, websites, and blogs. The Editor read so much humorous material that he finally went mad, leapt up from his desk, shoved a pen into his shirt pocket, and dashed out into the gray Connecticut afternoon to spread the gospel of funny to the world.

After realizing he was only wearing short-sleeves, however, the Editor quickly dashed back inside to acquire a fleece jacket, a sidekick, and a plan. A North Face hanging in his closet supplied item number one. Bursting into his common room, where his roommate lay sprawled on the futon watching ESPN Classic, he decided to take care of the second.

“Hey,” he called to the prone figure. “Wanna go on an adventure? We can grab some beer and pizza afterwards.”

The Roommate stirred and seemed to nod slightly, which the Editor took to be a sign of assent. “Great!” the Editor exclaimed. “I'll meet you outside. Let's do it to it!”

And with that, still not wearing any shoes, he ran back out into the wintry day.

Many an adventure was undertaken by these two epic wayfarers as they sojourned through the alleys and byways of their town. Driven mad by a constant diet of humor, the Editor's fevered brain saw famous comedians standing on every street corner and rooting through every garbage can.

“Look! It's David Letterman dispensing jokes and prizes to his live studio audience” he cried excitedly to the Roommate, who was sullenly munching on an absurdly large ham-and-honey-mustard sub held in one hand while taking swigs from a can of PBR held in the other.

“Nah,” the Roommate replied in between bites of his sandwich. “That's just the Flower Lady.”

The Editor appeared not to hear him. “And that, my dear friend, must be Letterman's archrival, Jay Leno. His massive chin and derivative one-liners make my blood boil. To arms!”

“That's not Leno,” the Roommate said, belatedly looking up from his oversize sandwich, “that's—”

But the Editor was already charging full tilt at the bewildered, be-jalapeño-trousered burrito cart vendor, who with a comical cry of Latin consternation leapt out of the way at the last minute. Black beans and guacamole flew in the air as the Editor reduced the immigrant's meager livelihood to shambles with a series of spastic kicks. Shaking his head ruefully, the Roommate sidled up to the crowd beginning to gather by the spectacle.

A mounted policeman noticed the fracas and trotted up.

“What's all the ruckus?” he asked a little irrelevantly. His head festively bedecked with shredded lettuce, the Editor glanced up from the destroyed remains of the burrito cart. Spying the policeman, his eyes lit up.

“Mr. Stewart,” the Editor said reverently, approaching the officer. “This is truly an honor.”

“What the—hey kid, what do you think you're doing?” the thoroughly confused policeman exclaimed. Retreating, his horse shied, and the man lost his balance and fell off his mount. Seizing the opportunity, the Roommate threw what remained of his sandwich to the ground and, grabbing the delusional Editor, thrust him toward the horse.

“Ride! Ride!” he shouted, hoisting the Editor onto the steed and slapping it on the rump for good measure. With a lusty whinny, the horse took off in what would have been the direction of the sunset (had it not been 37 degrees and overcast) and carried the Editor off to yet another humorous adventure.

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