The Mighty Checkbook of Fez-Mohammad

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Laverne thought her problems were solved when Bessy agreed to loan her the money. Unfortunately, Bessy was killed the next day by an oscillating fan that she had purchased at Woolworth's. The blade became loose, broke through the wire guard and flew across the room. It lodged firmly in Bessy's chest—killing her instantly.

Laverne thought about asking Bessy's husband for the money at the wake, but it didn't seem like a good idea. She was right back where she had started. She needed money to buy David an anniversary present.

She was walking down Fifth Avenue when a man in a turban approached her. "Excuse please. I am Fez-Mohammad Rasheed Abuman the third. I must tell you that you are very beautiful."

"Thank you." Laverne was still recovering from his name.

"Could I for to please ask favor of you?"

"Maybe." She was intrigued. What could this multi-named, turbaned man want?

"Would it be possible for me to buy your head?"

"Get lost, you pervert." She tried to walk away, but he grabbed her arm.

"No, no. I think you not understand. Nothing sexual. I would like to buy your head."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"I am working on some experiments, like your American Dr. Frankenstein. I need your lovely head."

"How much?"

"What would you want?"

"I don't know, I've never sold my head before. What's the going rate?"

"I will check." He removed a small note-pad and a calculator from his pockets. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-five."

"Okay." He glanced at some figures and graphs in the pad and began hitting numbers on the calculator.

"Well? I haven't got all day."

"Do you have any credit cards?"

"Yes, Visa."

"How about Sears, or American Express?"

"Just Visa and Macy's."

"Macy's is good."

"For what?"

"Ten-percent more."
“Oh.” She nodded as if she understood why.
“The blue-book value on your head is eight-hundred and fifty dollars.”
“No, I don’t think so.” Enough was enough.
“Okay, nine-hundred.”
“A thousand.”
“No, too much.”
“Okay, ‘bye.”
“Wait!”
“Look do you want my head or not? I can go and sell it somewhere else.”
“Okay, a thousand. Here is my card. Come to the address tomorrow morning at nine o’clock.”
“Fine.” What a miracle! Now she would have enough to buy David a present and pay off her Macy’s charge.
Laverne was so happy that she forgot that her best friend had been killed last week by a piece of spinning plastic.

David almost had the money for Laverne’s anniversary present. His old college buddy Steve had agreed to give it to him, but he never lived to make the withdrawal. Steve was killed by a Q-tip. He had been in the bathroom cleaning the wax from his ear with a wooden-stem Q-tip, the cotton end deep in the crevice, when his wife opened the door very suddenly. It hit his elbow and his hand pushed the Q-tip into the spongy side of his brain. Steve was dead before he hit the floor.

Dave was mad at Steve. He had always been compulsive about ear cleanliness. While rooming together at NYU, Dave had told Steve, “One day you’re gonna put one of those too far in and you’ll be sorry.” Steve never did listen to Dave’s suggestions.

Where would he get the money?
He was trudging down Thirty-third Street, trying to think of a way to make some quick cash, when a small man in a turban stopped him.
“Excuse please.”
“Yes?” Tourist. Probably wants directions.
“Could I buy your body?”
“Go screw yourself, sick-o.”
“No, no. You not understand. I mean for the work I am doing.”
“What, like modeling?”
“Not exactly. You are very tall, and in very good shape. I am working on experiment.”
“What are you, some kind of Frankenstein?”
“Yes! Exactly! I would pay you very good for your body.”
“How much?”
“One moment please.” He removed a small note-pad and calculator from his pockets. “How old are you?”

“Twenty-six.”

“Do you have any credit cards?”

“No.”

“What about a library card?”

“Yes, for the NYU library. Why?”

“Oh, library card is good for five percent more.”

“Oh, of course!”

“I can give you two thousand dollars.”

“Get out of here!” Dave was shocked.

“Okay, twenty-five hundred.”

He didn’t know what to say.

“Well?”

“Okay, sure.”

“Very good, here is my card. Come to the address at nine-thirty tomorrow.”

Two thousand bucks! He could buy Laverne a great present AND buy that new television.

If at that moment someone would have said, “I heard about Steve,” David would have asked, “Steve who?”

Laverne stared at her face in the bathroom mirror. She ran her fingers along every inch of the skin. She did this for an hour, silently saying good-bye.

David sat in his Lazy-boy recliner feeling his muscles, rubbing his genitals. I’m gonna miss you guys, he thought.

Each was so wrapped up in farewells that they did not notice the strange behavior of the other. Neither mentioned the events of the afternoon. They wanted to surprise each other.

That night they made love like they never had before. every position, with attitudes varying from passion to violence. It was great and both quietly hoped it would be enough to last a lifetime.

Laverne fell asleep comforted by the thought that she would no longer have to pay Macy’s nineteen percent interest.

Steve could not sleep. He was too excited about having his very own remote control.

Laverne lay on the table watching Fez-Mohammad wash his hands. “There’s just one thing I wanted to ask you.”

“Yes?”
"How will I think?"

He looked puzzled, as if the answer were obvious. "With your heart, of course. Some of your rational thought will be gone, but you'll still be able to think. Most people think with their hearts anyway. The brain is rarely used, except for exact figuring. An engineer or an architect would be lost without his brain, but most people never use theirs."

"Oh, okay."

Five minutes later her head was off. Fez-Mohammad sealed the stump of her neck with a small blowtorch. He left a small slit so Laverne could breathe. He told her that in a few hours she would be able to speak through the opening as well.

"Write your address on this slip of paper. You can give it to the cabdriver."

To her amazement Laverne discovered that she could write even though she could not see the paper.

"Here, wear this so you don't attract attention." He rested a Mets hat over the stump. "There. No one will notice. I'll put the check in your bag."

On a separate sheet she wrote, "How come I can hear?"

"You're interpreting the vibrations. In a few days you will be able to enjoy music as well."

A nurse helped her downstairs and into a cab. The cab driver noticed her cap as she got in and rambled for the entire ride about the chances of the Mets winning the World Series again. He didn't stop long enough to notice that his passenger had no head.

Laverne thought, I love New York cabbies.

When they reached her address she took some money out of her purse. Her fingertips had already become incredibly sensitive. She could feel the five on the five dollar bill.

David listened to the buzz saw slice through his neck. He felt no pain, for Fez-Mohammad had given him several shots of tequila before the amputation. David felt a brief tingling sensation as the blade splintered his spine. A moment later he watched Fez carry his body into a large freezer.

The blowtorch hurt a little, but David felt better once he knew the bleeding had stopped.

"There, all done."

"You know Fez old buddy, I feel so..so thin."

They laughed.

"How am I gonna get home?"

"My nurse will put you in a cab."

"Oh, okay."
“Here is your check. I’ll tape it to your forehead.”
“Fine. Listen, could your nurse pay the cabbie in advance and give him something extra to carry me up to my apartment?”
“Of course.”

David sat in the back of the cab looking around.
“Hey buddy,” the cabbie said, “you feelin’ all right?”
“Yeah. I just had some surgery.”
“I was gonna say, you look...I don’t know. You look kinda funny. But I’m not sure why.”
“I’ll be all right.”
The cab bounced through a pothole and Dave rolled onto the floor. “Shit.”
“You okay?”
“Yeah, I just fell on the floor.”
“You want me to pull over?”
“Nah, keep going.”

As the cab went around each corner, Dave rolled along the hard floor. The envelope was still stuck to his forehead, but his hair had gotten tangled in some gum that had been splotched on the grey bottom of the cab.
The cabbie placed Dave in front of his door and rang the bell. By the time Laverne answered he was gone.

Dave looked up at Laverne. “Hi honey, I’m home.”
“Hey babe.”

Dave rocked himself back and forth a few times. Eventually he got up enough momentum and rolled himself into the apartment. “What ‘cha doing?”
“Just listening to some Vivaldi.”
“Oh.” He rolled himself next to the couch where she sat. “Laverne, you look different. Did you change your hairstyle?”
“Oh Dave! You never notice anything!” She ran into the bedroom sobbing.

“Wait honey!” He rolled after her.
She sat hunched on the bed, her body convulsing as if she were crying.
Dave stopped by her feet. “I’m sorry. I’ve had a rough morning. Wait a minute! What happened to your head?”
“Oh, finally! I sold it to get money to buy you an anniversary present.”
“Really? What did you get me?”
“I ordered you a set of weights from the Home Shopping Club.”
Dave broke out laughing.
“It’s not funny! I sell my head and you laugh!”
“Honey, you can’t see me. I sold my body so I could buy you a present.”

Sketch • 51
"Really?"
"Yeah, reach down by your feet. I'm right here."
She picked him up.
"Oh, Dave, I'm sorry. You're so sweet."
"Could you take this envelope off my forehead?"
"Sure."
"Thanks."
"What did you get me for our anniversary?"
"You wouldn't believe me if I told you."
"Try me."
"You know that pair of Ray-Bans you always wanted? The ones Tom Cruise wears?"
"Yes."
"Well, I have them on layaway. I guess there's no sense in picking them up now."
"Oh Dave, we really do love each other don't we?"
"I would say so. Hey listen, I've got an idea. You know how when people are really in love they say they are 'like one?'"
"Yes."
"Well, why don't we have my head sewed onto your body?"
"That would be great! Real togetherness."
"Okay. Let's drive to the emergency room at the hospital."
"How can we drive?"
"I'll tell you. First put me down on the bed and get one of my Reeboks from the closet."

She rested him on the edge of the mattress. When she got up the quilt shifted and he fell on the floor. "Shit."
"What's the matter honey?"
"I fell on the floor."
"I'm sorry."
"It's okay. Just get the shoe and take the lace off."
"Dave, who did you sell your body to?"
"Some dude named Fez."
"Me too!"
"Really, how much did you get?"
"A thousand bucks!"
"I got twenty-five hundred for my body!"
"Really." She was hurt that he had gotten more.
"Yeah."
"I've got the lace."
“Let’s go.”

Laverne sat behind the wheel. “What are we gonna do?”
“Tie one end of the lace around each of my ears and hang me from the rear-view mirror.”
“Hey, that’s a pretty good idea!”
As they pulled out of the garage Dave knew what it was like to be an air-freshener.

They drove through the traffic with Dave directing and Laverne steering. They were stopped at a red light when a group of Chinese tourists noticed them. One man asked if it was all right if they took a few pictures.
“Sure,” Dave said.
Each member of the sight-seeing gang pulled a camera from a secret pocket. Dave smiled and Laverne waved.
The Chinese gang said “thank you” and moved on.
Dave said, “I bet we’ll be the talk of the bathhouses when they get home.”
“We’re just a couple of crazy New Yorkers.”
“The light’s green.”

Laverne put Dave down on the counter of the emergency room reception desk.
The big nurse said, without looking up from her forms, “Can I help you?”
“Yes, I have a rather serious cut.”
She raised her head and got a look of boredom on her face, as if to say, “Oh, another decapitation.”
“I’d like some stitches.”
“The doctor will decide if you need stitches, sir. How did it happen?”
“I was shaving.”
“Okay. Fill out these forms and bring them back when you’re done.”
“Could I borrow a pen?”
She looked little annoyed. “Don’t try and steal it.”
“I won’t.” Laverne took the pen and they walked to the waiting area.
The man sitting next to them was holding a handkerchief over his left eye.
Dave spoke to him from Laverne’s lap. “What happened to you?”
The guy looked down at Dave with his good eye. “Microwaves.”
“Huh?”
“What are you, deaf? I said microwaves. I was watching my pizza cook and suddenly I went blind in my left eye. I guess there’s a leak or something. My wife has to go and buy the damn thing on sale. I told her you don’t get a good microwave for twenty bucks.”

Sketch • 53
“Yeah.”
“What’s your story?”
“Cut myself shaving.”
“Yeah? I used to cut myself a lot too. You should try an electric razor.”
Dave noticed that Laverne had magically completed the forms. “How did
you do that?”
“I don’t know. I just did it.”
The guy with the microwaved eye said, “Could you please shut up! I’m
in some serious pain.”
“Sorry.”
They brought the forms and the pen back to the nurse.
“Okay, you can go in. Room five.”
The guy yelled from the waiting room, “How come he gets in before me?
My friggin’ eyeball got roasted and you let him in first for a damn cut? What is this,
a popularity contest?”
The nurse yelled without looking at him, “Shut up. You’ll get your turn.”
Laverne sat on the examination table holding Dave on her lap. About ten
minutes later the doctor came in. The white coat he wore was so wrinkled and loose
that he looked as if he had just come from a frat house toga party. His tie was straight
from Salvation Army, and his disheveled hair made it obvious he had had a rough
morning.
He looked at Laverne and Dave. “What seems to be the problem?”
“I…”
“Oh, of course, your head.”
“Yeah.”
“Don’t worry. We’ll have you fixed up in a jiffy. Just lie down.” He took
a small bottle of Anbesol from the cabinet and sprinkled some on Laverne’s neck
and the bottom of Dave’s head. “Any special color thread.”
“Something in a nice blue.”
“Fine.”
Fifteen minutes later, Dave and Laverne were one person.
The doctor said, “The stitches will dissolve in about three days. There may
be a little scar, but there’s nothing I can do about that; modern medicine hasn’t gotten
that far yet.”
“No problem.”
Dave thanked him and left.
On the way out Dave and Laverne discovered that they could communicate
just by thinking.
Dave thought, “Laverne, do you want me to drive?”
She thought back, “Yeah, okay.”
They laughed silently.

Back at the apartment, Laverne said, “Dave I just thought of something.”
“What?”
“Now you’ll know what it feels like to get your period.”
“Shit.”
“Now maybe you’ll understand why I used to get moody.”
“Hey, you thought about that without me realizing it. I guess that means we can have private thoughts, or conversations.”
“Yeah. That’s good. Everybody needs some privacy.”
“I was just thinking, I’ll have to quit my job.”
“But you love working at the bank.”
“Yeah, but now I’ve got the biggest tits at the branch.”
“Oh, I forgot.”
“Remember last month? Your cousin Murray said if I ever wanted to sell insurance over the phone he could get me a job with his firm.”
“That’s right.”
“I’ll call him tomorrow.”
“I love you.”
“I love you too.”
They kissed silently, invisibly.

-M.A. Baldassare