Revenge of the Fifty-Thousand Pound Man

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Revenge of the Fifty-Thousand Pound Man

I sell bull sperm.
I traveled the crazy international circuits out of Wisconsin where dairying is king and prize bulls give their all for one hay-filled room and three square meals a day. If bulls had brains they’d nearly be humans and would reap the benefits of their animal enthusiasms.

They could have my job.

Then they would make unjustifiable amounts of money moving five-hundred thousand units of their own freeze-dried futures daily. They would travel Europe and Africa. They would get wake-up calls in the best hotels. They would get used to cold toast in the morning, warm beer at night. They would learn to talk to livestock they couldn’t stand. They would explore living rooms of the free world and come out smiling every time. They would, at parties, drink themselves into deeper and deeper levels of foolishness, but never appear more ridiculous than the creatures from the front office. They would be instantly recognizable as being exactly what they were: bad hoofers waltzing on the burned-out edge of someone else’s senseless and savage nightmare.

So as the plane landed back home in Madison with the bulls stampeding in my head, I reconciled myself to some great and equally senseless act like quitting the whole shooting match—selling the stocks, the car, the condo—blowing off my clients, and spending every last goddamned dime I had. And I had someone to spend it on too.

Her name was Connie and rather than going to the office to turn in the accounts, I took her out to the scary west-side where the sun sets over a million separate shopping malls, a place where a lot of people are really never seen or heard but leave evidences of themselves. It’s so scary... But Connie liked the clothes, the fashion. Connie, you see, liked to be liked, so that she liked everything and everything liked her. That was the deal she had cut with life. That was her special gift. She flowed. And I needed that. I needed something.

We went to this dinner-bar thing in the parking lot of the Brentwood mall. A digital clock and “go Badgers!” There was dinner. There were drinks. Piano music, pleeze. And there was bare-shouldered Connie, hair-up, legs crossed demurely, big eyes like silver dollars. She was a perfect model of herself.

“You look like sin. Are you sick?” she said.
“Tired.”
“Long trip?”

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"A vicious whirlwind experience."
"Good music, huh. I like the old stuff. I like the new stuff too, but sometimes it gets a little too—"
"Digital," I said.
"Not exactly that, but something else."
"What do you want to do?"
"Oh, I don’t know. There are a lot of things, I s’pose. What do you want to do? I mean we could just talk. I mean I have something to tell you—"
"I want to quit my job. You want to get married?"
"No," she said. "What brought this on?"
"It’s the bulls. I’m disappointed in them."
"Oh. I see."
She took a sip from her pink margarita, lit a cigarette, and looked at me hard and square. She blew one puff of smoke just above my head. "I don’t suppose it would do any good to ask you why you want to quit your job, would it?" She put the cigarette out.
"O the bulls, the bulls—where’s the hump?"
"Why do you want to get married?"
"Do you want to get married?"
"Not like this, I don’t."
A Marimba player got up from one of the tables and joined the piano player in a Latin version of *Mama, Don’t Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowboys.*
"We could have separate honeymoons," I said.
"You’re being a shit. I don’t like you when you’re like this."
"Like what."
"Like hating everything. Like me. Like your life. You think you know everything, but you don’t. You don’t know me; you don’t know yourself; you don’t know anything, and you’re going nowhere. You’re nothing but a giant, immature, baby!" Connie looked for her purse.
"Anything else bothering you?" I said.
"Shut up. I want to go home."
The crowd began to clap to the beat and sing along with the song’s chorus. A beefy-faced booster at the table next to us knocked a pitcher of beer onto the floor. It shattered in one loud complaint and not much else. The piano player sang:

*Hey, hey hey....*

*That’s okay—ay—ay*

*Babies don’t let your*

*Mama’s grow up*
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And get away—ay—ay
It brought the house down.
“I’ll drive you home,” I said.
“I’ll bus it.”
“C’mon, I’ll pay for the cab.”
“Leave me alone, you shit, you.”
And then she was gone, heels clicking in a perfect counter-rhythm to the music. As waitresses scurried to sop up the meandering beer, the booster’s wife, a charming woman of indeterminate age, leaned over to me and said, “She’s a very beautiful girl.”
“Yes, she is.”
“Well, if I were you, I wouldn’t worry about it too much. Those kind are always high-strung.”
“Thank you.”
Beefy, her husband, looked at me like I was the next big disease so I excused myself, sat up at the bar, and murdered the next few hours or so. Conventional weapons. Plenty of ice. I was living the life of livestock after all. And sedation was the key....
So it went something like ConniethisandConniethat for quite a while and ended with she was probably right and probably wrong about a lot of things, but all that just left me sitting at the bar. And I drank more.
The piano player sang a bluesy version of Hotel California that really wasn’t half bad, and a honey-haired waitress began to twist slowly to the music.
It seemed the right time to make a move, so I slid off my stool, sidled up to her and said, “Howdy, I’m from France! Would you like to see some sperm? I got samples out in the car. A whole caseful.” Then she gave me this screwed-up look that indicated that she had missed the humor of the whole situation, a point which was reiterated by the manager of the place who, between the popping of his finger on my sternum, asked me to leave. I, in turn, tried to explain the situation but only managed to communicate, “Look, you sack of shit-dust, I sell it. for godsakes!” He took the first swing. And that was pretty much the whole deal.
Now I’m not sure if I had help finding the door or it found me, but we met, danced briefly and went our separate ways: it, attached and secure—me, to night’s open arms.
And in that darkness, I saw what I saw.
He was sitting in the parking lot in lotus position wearing a herring-bone blue suit, red tie, black shoes, no laces. The store’s lights weren’t bright enough to make anything out of his face, but the shadows there and the shape of his
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head indicated nothing too unusual. In fact, he looked like a million businessmen all over the world except for one outrageous detail—it was well over four-hundred feet from his tailbone to the top of his head.

I rubbed my eyes.
He stretched, yawned.
I looked away, turned back, and refocused; I could feel eyes larger than me looking at me. "Howdy," I said as nonchalantly as I could, then looked down and headed for the car, hoping I wouldn't disturb whatever it was he was doing.
"Wait!" his voice boomed. "Who are you?"
I felt an obligation to respond: "My name is Johnson. I'm from the planet Earth. This is a parking lot on the planet Earth. Parking lots are for cars." I walked over to my car and pointed it out to him. "This is a car—no—sir, this is not a car exactly—this is a Ford. A Ford is a type of car. We use cars to communicate with one another. But, you see, the deal is I left my keys to my car, this car, in there, the bar, where I have to go now and get the keys to the car, the Ford, so I can communicate and be a normal human being—I mean, I'm not saying normal is necessarily a good thing. I mean, I know a whole lot of people who aren't normal, but boy-oh-boy are they nice—"
" Silence!" he said.
I did that easily enough. His voice shook the panes of glass on the storefronts.
"My name is Davis." He looked around the lot, at the cars motoring down the adjacent highway, at the moon. "You open your eyes and everything appears before you. That is how it works; is that not true?"
I was in no position to disagree, and besides, it seemed reasonable enough.
"Yes," I said enthusiastically, "that's exactly how it works!"
"Good. You, Johnson, will attend me...."
"Mr. Davis, don't get me wrong, but I've got a job I love and a car and a house and several women who really, really hate me so I don't think I'll have enough time—"
" Silence!" His forehead, or what I thought was his forehead, glowed blue and the air smelled like rotten eggs. Suddenly, and I mean it too, three flaming pink thunderbolts flew from out of the blue, and the Honda dealership across the street exploded neatly in one monstrous fireball. "Yes, I'll work for you!" I found myself saying. "I don't know what came over me! Such an opportunity! I'll—"
" Silence!"
And I don't know exactly why, but I began thinking about the pets I had
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when I was a kid. When I was four, I had a dog, a shepherd named Midnight. 
As Midnight is my shepherd, I shall not rant.

What a cuddly pup!

“All I know,” Davis said, “is that I want things. You, Johnson, will make 
sure I get them.”

As I enthusiastically agreed to Davis’ terms, the bar door, my erstwhile 
dancing partner, flew open and the crowd spilled out into the parking lot headed 
by Beefy: “What in god-awful hell is goin on out here?” It didn’t take too long 
for him or anyone else to figure it out. There were gasps, hollers, bleats, oooohs, 
ahhs; one woman and several men fainted dead away. Most just stood gaping 
and uttering half-sounds like engines do when the battery dies.

When Davis stood up, several ran back into the bar screaming and tearing 
their hair out which is something I never saw before, but always heard about. It 
was one of those deals.

“This man a friend of yours?” Beefy asked.

“We just met.”

“Oh, I see.” Beefy took a couple steps forward. “Hel-lo there.” He waved 
his arm in one exaggerated semi-circle of salutation. “You’re about the biggest 
goddammed son-of-a-bitch I ever did see. Why you must weigh over a thousand 
pounds, ain’t that right?”

No answer.

“You think he heard me?” Beefy asked me.

“Oh, I dunno. Like I said, we just met.”

Beefy’s wife grabbed me by the arm, “Aren’t you scared?”

“Shitless.”

“So am I.”

I had a cat once, but Midnight chewed it up. Never had one after that either. 
Beefy went on: “My name is Arnold Vandenberg of Vandenberg, Heist, 
and Plum. I’m a goddamned lawyer!” Beefy Arnold reached into his vest 
pocket, pulled something out and began waving it above his head. “Here’s my 
card!”

Car crashes. Sirens. Chairs flying through the bar window. And a giant in 
the Brentwood mall parking lot. It was too untidy for words. Connie wouldn’t 
have liked it at all.

“The point is,” Beefy said, “you people in the entertainment game need 
legal representation....”

“Arnie, is that any way to treat people?” Beefy’s wife said. “I mean, really 
sometimes your way with people is so inelegant.”

“Mary, let me handle this. This is business,” Beefy said.
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“This is not business,” she said. “You’re bullying him.”

“And what do you know about business!” Beefy said to his wife.

“I know everything about business!” she screamed back at him. “For your information, buddy boy, I’ve spent the last fifteen years of my life dealing with caterers for your parties, making your appointments, checking your books, and talking to your clients like they were people, like they were elegant!”

I saw just the faintest blue glow appear on Davis’ forehead, then looked at the smoldering rubble of the Honda dealership. “I don’t think we’re dealing with people here,” I hastened to interject.

“Mind your own business!” they said.

And they went on arguing about whose pot was being pissed in by who, apparently oblivious to the blue swell around Davis’ head which revealed the dark furrow of his giant brow. At one point, they competed for Davis’ attention: Beefy madly waving his card above his head, screaming, “tax loopholes, investment schedules, stock options;” his wife screaming, elegantly, of course, “hors d’oeuvres, Russian ballet, the French Modernist View!” And I had just enough horse sense left to distance myself from them.

Then, when the night sky turned pink and Davis’ full height was revealed in stark silhouette, Beefy stopped, she stopped, and I desperately wished that the whole creation would split open and swallow me for good. Two pink thunderbolts flew from his forehead and vaporized the pair. Nothing was left of them except for a pair of high heels and a pack of Marlboros.

Davis put his massive hands on his hips and scowled at me fearfully.

“Oh for godssakes, Johnson!” he bellowed. You actually knew those people?”

A few thunderbolts here, a few thunderbolts there and in no time Davis got everything he wanted—which was everything. The world was his. There wasn’t anything anybody could do except pretend that everything was going to turn out all right or wrap themselves up in the good old days when the world was a wreck and nobody understood anybody.

And on top of all this were the strange occurrences that accompanied Davis’ arrival:

In Long Island, New York, a man divorced his wife so he could marry his swimming pool’s statue.

In the South, three thousand black stable boy carriage steps were arrested for stealing lawn lanterns.

West on Mt. Rushmore, Thomas Jefferson’s head was pulled over for doing ninety on the Lewis and Clark trail.
A huge wall had to be erected around the Statue of Liberty because she kept on lifting her skirt up over her head and smiling. Davis, of course, climbed over that wall, and for a few minutes, the Earth moved, shaking skyscrapers around the globe.

Sheep sang; olive trees danced; rivers had trouble deciding which way to flow; horses talked airily of what “is” and “is not;” bulls went shopping for shoes.

A lot of people couldn’t cope. Churches and other mental institutions were flooded with people who complained that the only things they thought about were the pets they had as small children. Scientists were completely baffled and either became drunks or psychologists. Corporate executives, finally having realized that a free market system couldn’t survive when individual freedom was determined by one selfish and careless omnipotent tyrant, threw themselves out the window.

Some of them bounced once or twice.

As for me, I was too busy with paperwork to think about anything else. There were extraordinary accounts to manage, rents to collect, the media to lie to (“It’s just a matter of reconstructing attitudes about money, livestock, trees, and statues, after all... Everything is going to be all right. Don’t worry. Be happy!”); there were debits and credits and taxes and stocks to manipulate so that nobody really knew what was happening, and the phones rang like there was no tomorrow. Then there was Davis himself who never ate, who never slept, who never changed his suit, whose furious temper I had to try to keep subdued. And there was Connie who claimed that she was in love with him.

“What!” I yelled from behind the desk.

“I like his style....” she went on dreamily.

“What! He wears the same suit every day!”

“...I like the way he walks....”

“But he steps on people!”

“...I like the way he talks....”

“But he doesn’t talk. He orders!”

“...I just think he’s divine!”

“Look, he’s too big for you. You’re in love with an abstraction!”

“Johnson!” Davis bellowed through the Oval Office window.

“I’m busy.”

“Ooooh, that voice,” Connie said. “It’s so dreamy...” And she fainted right on the Persian rug. Looking at her, I knew that something had to be done. You see for me reality had always been one real strange fandango, the secret boog-a-loo on the shelf behind the canned goods—but for Connie? This time Davis had

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gone too far.

“Johnson, get out here right now!” Davis said.

I leaped over the slumbering Connie and rushed out into the hallway, offering my howdies to everyone in passing. The President was there too. He had lost his teeth again and wandered aimlessly in his bathrobe, searching every room, holding his toothbrush out as a kind of denture diving-rod.

I strolled out to the rose garden and talked to Davis as he sat on his favorite stool, the White House roof.

“I want something,” Davis grumbled.

“But you've got everything. There isn’t anything else to want. Not here. If you want to go to another planet that has a lot of stuff to want, then by all means, go there because I’m completely swamped. I’ve got the Arabs on my back. South Africa is delinquent on their rent, and the Soviets still aren’t convinced you’re real. I haven’t slept for two weeks! I haven’t even—“

“For godssakes, Johnson, I’m bored. I want to do something.”

“What about visiting your girlfriend—Miss Liberty?”

He thought about that for a moment. “Liberty? I am bored with her.”

It figured. “Look,” I said, “you can do anything you want. Use your imagination.”

“I haven’t an imagination. I don’t need one.” Davis looked tired, confused, but then he got angry. “You are supposed to get me the things I want!” He got up off of his stool, took two giant steps over to my car, and stomped it flat as a dime.

“Why don’t you play some golf.” I said looking at the remnant of my Ford. “That’s what men in your position do.”

“Play?”

“Yes you take a little white ball and knock it around the woods, thrilling to your own energies until you get it in the hole. It would be perfect for you.”

“Arrange it for me, then, Johnson.”

“I will, and just one more thing—Egypt just called to say the Sphinx just crapped all over the President’s lawn down there. I don’t understand it—the Sahara’s the biggest litter-box on the planet—but they blamed me, and I just want you to know: your cat, your responsibility!”

“Oh, for godssakes, Johnson!”

California, west of Arizona, is rich in its cultural heritage and history. It is the story of Sutter’s Mill and Hollywood, Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan and Bob Hope, Caesar Chavez and killer bees, the silicon valley, paranoia, Disneyland. And cars.
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From its northern border, it’s also a perfect dog leg to the left.

But there were problems. The first thing was that the population of the fareway (the big valley between Redding and Bakersfield) fruit, nut and vegetable growers, business folk, and, you know, other people with names, did not take to the idea at first. They all wanted to know how well Davis played golf, fearing that too many misses would tear up the world’s most complicated irrigation system, ruin crops, and wreck property such that everybody would have to live in Los Angeles. And nobody wanted that.

So I lied. Told them that Davis practiced every day by hitting balls from Camp David out into the Atlantic. Told them that they would be compensated at twice the insured rate of the property. Told them taxes would be reduced. Told them everything that they thought they wanted to hear. There really wasn’t anything anybody could do about the situation—they knew it and I knew it—but they took comfort in the lie anyway, and gave the okay.

The other problem was the equipment. Boeing made the driver out of jet fuselages which were welded together and fitted to sequoia trunks, cut into half moon shapes. U.S. Steel made the irons and the putter out of giant sand molds cut into the Mojave Desert. A blimp hanger was used for the bag; and the balls—good god—the balls were fashioned from four miles of unwound truck retreads, rewound again for vitality, then surrounded by one layer of Teflon, one layer of steel belts and an outside layer of surlyn. Two balls. No tees.

Nineteen thousand acres east of Bakersfield were bulldozed and resodded for the green, and were ready to go—except for the biggest problem.

Davis.

I showed him films, showed him all the greats—Hogan, Snead, Nicklaus—taught him everything I knew about the game, but he wouldn’t or couldn’t listen. He would lose his patience, if he had had any at all, and during practice sessions, he’d miss the ball then throw his clubs out into the Atlantic and we’d have to wait until the Coast Guard returned them. Then he’d blame me and start snorting and stomping around like a great mad bull, so that the resale value of my cars (eight of them in a week) amounted to a little more than a cup of coffee, a piece of pie, and some polite conversation. And he was losing something else. He looked tired all the time; his orders turned into complaints, then into whines. And Connie blamed me too.

“You’re ruining him!” she wailed. “He looks so old!”

“He’s doing just fine,” I lied. “Everything is going to turn out all right.”

The same lie seemed to work on everybody, and when I realized the fact, I saw my way out.

One day, when Davis had shanked his practice drive into the Empire State
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Building, reducing it to the size of a Seven-Eleven, I told him, “What a marvellous shot! You’re doing just fine! Everything is going to be okay!” So as Davis fired errant shops to all points on the coast, from Martha’s Vineyard to Key Biscayne, I could see a new purpose in his stride. Davis was grooving his swing. He was grooving it badly.

All the media came to Redding. Radio, newspapers, television, teachers, publishing houses, rock-and-roll stars, ad consultants, movie moguls, politicians, clergy, loan offices—all were invited by me to witness Davis golf California (except the loan officers; they seem to follow me wherever I go). The networks called it “A Big Event,” and, consequently, a carnival atmosphere prevailed. No kidding. Cotton candy, balloons, Pepsi, music, clowns, rides, dogs, kids running around with “Big Guy” dolls tucked under their arms, guess-my-weight contests: Redding came down like the Fourth of July, but I couldn’t help wondering if I might have just bought the farm on this one. Things could get nasty.

He used a pine tree for a tee, stuffed his tie into his shirt pocket, and swung, the air following behind the club with such force that it knocked everybody to the ground. But when everyone had dusted themselves off and looked around, the ball was still on the tee. Davis had missed.

“Is he okay?” Connie asked me.

“Everything is going to be all right,” I said.

A buzz of rumors, the static sound of static in a glass jar, began to emanate from the crowd.

Davis looked at me, eyes narrowing.

“It’s all right,” I said. “Everything is okay.”

Davis addressed the ball again with the same results, and people began to laugh. “The guy’s a comedian,” an old miner chortled. I could see the media folks taking notes or rushing for the phones. I patted myself on the back for having been so clever to set and spring this little trap, but only for a minute or two.

An armada of black bottom cumulus clouds moved in and battled the sun for the sky. It began to rain. I looked at Davis’ head which went from blue to red when his next shot went no more than ten feet. His eyes were on fire, and I mean it too!

“What’s wrong with him.” I grabbed Connie by the arm and made for the helicopter, the crowd’s hysterical laughter following in our wake.

Then all hell broke loose. The sky was filled with pink and green lightning bolts; hail as big as Buicks fell on either side of us; trees couldn’t handle the wind and flew away. I couldn’t see Davis because of the great divots he was

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churning in every direction, and then, suddenly, everything was flying in crazy circles around us. The helicopter had exploded. We found a ditch and covered ourselves. Avocados, oranges, grapes, lettuce, cabbage leaves, snow peas and several varieties of nuts dropped on us in a bizarre raining salad. I damned near choked to death.

Not much longer after that the calm warmth of the victorious sun drew us out of the ditch, and we made our way back to the fareway. The other folks, too, climbed out of various holes, rubbing their eyes and yawning as if they had risen from a deep sleep. They got into their cars and drove away.

The wreckage was amazing. Bulls, sheep, pigs, and chickens grazed naturally among the great mounds of smoking vegetables and fruit, their suits and shoes having dropped off of them. Real trees were twisted and splintered along the sides of the fareway. Huge holes had been dug into the earth, and if I hadn’t known better, it would have looked like tornado storm damage, or that from an H-bomb, and not the tantrums of a giant with a golf club.

For ten miles Connie and I climbed and dug through stir-fried valley looking for Davis. Connie spotted him first.

He was lying on a hillside of cabbages in the sun. His suit was torn, the tie was gone, the collar open, his shoes needed a shine, and as we drew closer, we could see that his hair had gone gray. Except for his size, he looked like any middle-aged businessman in the full throes of a multiple burn-out, but he had just enough strength in him to raise one hand, point his finger at me: “Johnson, I’ll seek my revenge on you in a way you can’t possibly imagine.”

And, as his laughter echoed down the valley, I looked at Connie, and Connie looked at me, then we looked back, but there was nothing to look at. Davis had disappeared.

As near as I can recollect it, the next thing I heard was the jangle of keys at the cell door. I signed something at the desk acknowledging that I had been drunk and disorderly and that I would make good on my responsibilities to society, specifically, some minor reparations owed to the Brentwood Mall. I recollect being blinded by the sun as I stepped out of Madison’s finest; I recollect the sound of train wrecks in my head, and the feeling that someone was using a blow torch to cut his way out of that particular cavern and not having much success.

Then I recollect the sight of my Ford pulling up, Connie driving, and I recollect the angry edges of her face and the consequent gush of my apologies—my solemn promise to keep the job and my sanity. And I recollect something else.
“For godssakes, Johnson,” she said. “I’m pregnant!”

So you see, as I am writing this, he is knuckling around his playpen. He, who looks like Winston Churchill in miniature—as all eight-month-olds do—is planning his next move, his next act of terrorism. He has already terrorized the cat into a state past the normal cat psychosis, into a wild schizophrenia; it no longer can tell the difference between a litter box and my shoes. He has strewn toys, books, dishes, socks, food, and my business accounts all over the apartment. He has tried to eat the inedible: dirt from the garden, knobs off the television; he thinks the toilet seat is a teething ring. He has taxed my imagination to the limit as I have become, depending on his mood, a ducky, a horsey, a moo-moo cow. And when he isn’t crying or screaming his disaffections with his surroundings, he’s coming up with such verbal gems as “smoosh,” “bash,” and “bye-bye.”

Connie flows in from work, comes over to me, and leans over my shoulder.

“Watcha doin there, sport?” she says.

“Accounting.”

“Is everything okay?” she says brightly.

“Everything is just fine. Everything is going to be all right,” I say.

She waltzes through the shambles of the apartment over to the playpen and gives him his rattle—the only thing left in his playpen.

“There’s our big man,” she says. “Your daddy has some cleaning up to do, doesn’t he, Bo-bo.”

“Daddy is just about finished....”

She hoists him in the air, that big, gleeful smile spreading over his tiny face.

“Oh darling,” she says to me, “isn’t he just divine!”

“No doubt about it,” I say.

At that moment, I couldn’t have agreed with her more.