

ARTIE Q'S GUIDE TO MOVING IN LA

ARTIE Q

Artie Q's Guide to Moving in LA
A Novel by Artie Q
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Introduction

I have long been fascinated by the actions of others. I believe insightful mileage can be gained by regarding what is done and disregarding what is said. Little did I realize the profession on which I embarked was to give me the opportunity to observe in great detail, behavior that was not only spectacularly bizarre and relentlessly mundane, but also in plentiful supply.

My name is Artie Q and seventeen years ago I arrived in Los Angeles clutching a bag full of dreams and a catalogue of songs. I was in my late twenties still pursuing an elusive music career —“an imprisonable offense in the UK,” by the way. America, however, was open armed and open minded. I fell in love with the City of Angels immediately, and decided to stay. My music was hardly tearing up the town, and with the rent due and bills to pay, I was forced to find work ... and LA’s Moving Industry provided an inexhaustible supply.

I had come to take the music world by storm ... instead, I became a mover.

CHAPTER 1

Players & The Game

Nobody expects the movers to be real people. Perceived by most to be dull cardboard cut-outs; barely functioning half-wits; even outright criminals, eking out an existence on the fringes of society, who appear when summoned, do the job ... then disappear to their twilight parallel universe. Certainly not from a world of our own.

“I hope we get some decent guys this time. Marjie said the first thing one of her movers did was make a doodie in the bathroom that blocked the system ... and it backed up—*all the way down the hallway carpet!*”

“OH MY GOD.”

It seems like everyone who has moved has a horror story to tell.

“Said they were on a par with the wretches who built the Pyramids. Didn’t speak: they nodded and grunted. Look, I don’t care if they’re not able to string two syllables together but I’d like them to be ... decent. Well, decent enough—I just don’t want to be at the mercy of a pack of animals.”

Everybody dreads the day when the gray men who transport personal belongings to the new destination come to their front door.

Will they turn up three hours late?

Will they charge a fair price?

Will they have any teeth?

Will they scare the kids?

Will they handle those fragile, very fragile, and very, very fragile boxes (I packed) with care?

Even worse ... will I get the movers Marjie had?

“If only we could move without having them in the house.”

“Yeah. ...”

Unfortunately, if you have to relocate and have a bunch of stuff, they’re a painful necessity ... and at some point they will have to come in the house. *Sorry, Marjie.*

In LA, movers are on the same social rung as the leaf-blowing gardeners or India’s equivalent—the Untouchables. They’re dispensable. After all, anyone can do it, right? Actually, not anyone can do it for ten hours a day/six days a week, and do it proficiently. Though it’s not a professional career, it is a skilled job, when done well. You need the stamina of a horse to walk up and down stairs with heavy furniture in the heat. A deft touch is a plus when dealing with valuable pieces of art and difficult customers.

“How long will this take?” translates as *how much will this move cost me?* A fair question. Well, without the mover viewing the contents of a home and where they’re going, it’s a little like asking how long is a piece of string. It depends on variables: How much stuff there is; customer packed and ready to go; how long the walk from the front door to the truck; stairs; elevators; other pickups along the way; etc. Answer: Anywhere from a two-hour-minimum to two weeks. Rather than being charged by the hour (for large moves or upon request), an estimate is furnished by the mover

—a guaranteed price the move will not exceed, as long as the variables do not change. If it goes longer than the projected time frame, the company eats the profit. So, speed is another constraint in the equation.

The physical toll on a mover is intense and some seek the assistance of drugs and drink; I however, favor a good nutritional supplement. Cardio vascular exercise and healthy diet is a good support base, too. You do not need a chiropractor, acupuncturist, masseuse or psychic. Back braces need only be worn by supermarket checkout cashiers and furniture warehouse guys (delivering one couch a day). Contrary to views espoused by poorly informed individuals: Moving, when performed correctly, can strengthen muscles in the back and stomach and does not need to compound poor posture. People with bad backs are usually sedentary types with an office gig or the above mentioned delivery guys wearing weight belts. I believe the back problem is a mind issue as well.

The general image of a mover is one who wears the reverse baseball cap and loves beer, football, and pizza; he sports his beer belly and plumber's crack with pride, but the influence of Hollywood and the healthy SoCal sporty-lifestyle has put a different spin on the stereotype. So expect the unexpected on moving day in LA.

Three Categories of Mover

Basically, there are three types of mover in this city:

A. The career mover. Usually an honest, hard working man with no aspirations above making a success of the business.

B. The creative or showbiz guy who needs to pay the rent (alternative to restaurant work), while waiting for “the break.”

C. Compulsive, marginal sort (recovering—drugs, drink, life etc.) who, in between bouts of prison, you may find packing, loading ... and stealing your stereo equipment.

Moving tends to come in fits and spurts; there's either, way too much or very little. Busy times are the start, the middle, and the end of the month. This promotes constant work for core workers but not enough for borderline dudes. C type's are needed to pad out the crews when there is a “downpour,” but there are no scraps for them when times are lean. A reputable company will use A and B types because they reflect well on the company and only use C's when they have to. C's, frequently are good movers fallen from grace or barely good enough for moving and little else besides. After a dearth of moving and work starts to come in, C's can usually be found—drunk/stoned/getting more tattoos/recovering at the Coffee Bean 'n Tea Leaf but never Starbucks (“too corporate, Man”)/watching the game/eating pizza/in prison/living off their toothless Mother or girlfriend/living in an immobile RV/or just plain AWOL. Picture Sherlock Holmes when he had no cases to solve: He'd be in a drugged-out haze getting his fix at the opium den, right? Well, there you go ... just take away the brilliant violin-playing detective resplendent in tweed suit, wing tips, bow tie, pipe, and deerstalker—and you've got our man. A 40 something, skate boarding surfer dude.

Usually, the richest source for my observations come from C types, though B's make their contribution, too. A's are hard working and straight forward but yield little reward in humorous, excessive, or just plain odd behavior. And yet when some of the A's combine characteristics from

the other groups, things get interesting. For all their wonderful net result, it is usually because of C types that movers are awarded a bad image. However, for as many crazy movers, there's their equal number in completely whacked out mov-ees. In LA, of course.

An A, a B, and a touch of C

Two of us had gone out that day to move a lady's stuff into storage. She requested that we arrive after 10 a.m. and be loaded and on the road by 3:30 p.m. Fair enough. Movers are used to specific guidelines, but William was shaking head and sucking teeth over the particulars of the job. A sensory warning light was flashing in his head. The paperwork given to drivers at the start of a day can tell a lot about a situation—if you know how to read between the lines.

“See there, CASH ONLY. Highlighted and underlined. The office. They know somethin's up but they ain't telling. Nice neighborhood. So why the *cash only*? Maybe cos it's going into storage ... then where's the address? Large Items. NO SMALL STUFF. Could mean she's not packed and ready to go. Damn! I hate those last minute moves. ARRIVE AFTER TEN. MUST BE OUT BY THREE THIRTY. Hmm.”

He glanced sideways as I was reflecting on his nickname. Plate Glass Willy. He caught my look and I got the impression the crafty ol' devil knew what I was thinking.

Don't be ridiculous.

“Hmh,” I smiled in response.

Individually, none of these points would have tripped his wire, but collectively, the antenna was twitching. An attractive woman in a cool-blue business suit was waiting outside the house as we pulled up.

“Hey, young lady ... pretty as a snow covered mountain top!”

Coming from anyone else, I would have cringed at this remark. It could have been deemed offensive but somehow Willy's olde-worldy crusty style seemed innocent; besides, he was over twice the woman's age. It was a cheeky comment delivered in a clear tenor voice and hardly likely to qualify as sexual harassment. She took it in good part.

She welcomed us in, and had bought coffee and doughnuts for the movers. Upon viewing the premises, I was wondering at Willy's intuition.

Clean move, nice lady, straightforward enough. Surely?

“Except where the storage is at. She won't give me the address ... we have to *follow* her.”

Now, that did seem strange. It was another black mark in his growing list.

“Didja notice there were no boxes? AND” he held up a finger “*anyone* who waits for the movers outside the house ... yes sir! Right there. Suspicious, huh? HUH?”

The finger was now pointing at me. I was a rookie, but Willy was well experienced in moving smarts and listened closely to his intuitive sense. His beady eyes were darting back and forth, in step with thoughts whirring overtime. By now, I had no idea what to think and was thankful it was not me in charge.

Around one o'clock, we were surprised by an unknown man demanding to know what was doing in his home. *Wha—?* The girlfriend was blowing town and had he not surprised her for lunch, would have found his home stripped of furniture ... and the movers were first in the line of fire.

“I want *my* stuff, back in *my* home, *right now*.”

Willy's eyes narrowed, sizing the man up—a nerdy business type. Slight and shrill. Willy was solid oak with a bull neck. Still, it was a confusing *and* delicate situation: We'd spent the last two and a half hours loading the truck, and if we obliged the man—whom we didn't know from Adam; he could have been anyone—who was gonna pay? Business Suit Babe was the customer. She had engaged our services. She was paying the bill and should have been the one to decide what to do next. But she'd gone to the bathroom during his entrance and locked herself in, or rather, locked everyone else out.

“Well, here's the deal as I see it ...”

Initially, we'd been caught off guard but wily ol' Willy recovered well and explained the situation *as he saw it*. The man was now having second thoughts; the mover addressing him was not the kind you'd shove around. In time, he calmed down and not only paid us to return all goods but tipped generously as well. He even acquiesced to Willy's *cash only/up front*, though it meant going to a local ATM. (In problematic situations it is standard procedure for moving companies to ask for payment—dollar bills, of course—before unloading what is seen as collateral.)

When he returned, our “customer,” was a new man. He showed no sign of embarrassment, as if the whole thing was just part of life with Business Suit Babe. I thought he'd made with the gratuity so that we'd finish up ASAP, but by the end of the unload he was on the truck engaging us in chit-chat, as if he'd decided *Hey, you guys are all right!*

Fascinated by the mix of crew (a grizzled, gruff mover and an artsy fartsy white boy from the UK) he wanted to know our stories. This was getting more and more bizarre; yet, it was difficult to refuse a man who had so handsomely rewarded us.

My story in a nutshell: British Techno Head Artie Q, here to take the music world by storm. In my late twenties still pursuing an elusive music career, I came to Los Angeles clutching a bag full of dreams and a catalogue of songs. Falling in love with the City of Angels, I decided to stay. With the rent due, bills to pay and my music hardly tearing up the town, I was forced to find work ... and LA's Moving Industry provided an inexhaustible supply.

William was in his late fifties, maybe even sixty. As a young man he came up from the South to the “City of Milk and Honey,” and just like me, fell in love with LA and stayed. A self educated man. His two favorite topics: History and the Lakers ... well, any sports really. Willy's upbringing was dirt poor and his first and only job (before LA) was hauling bits of rail road track on his shoulders. In comparison, moving furniture was a cake walk and much more lucrative. He was a work-horse and if he could, would have been out on the trucks seven days a week. “Gotta earn that money, boy.” So he saved his dough and wasted not one penny. Willy sported the shuffling baggy-pants walk of a homeless man but his cheap twill trousers, half sleeve industrial shirts, and work caps were always cleaned and pressed. They said he was worth a boatload.

The word on Willy was that he'd thrown the owner of a moving company through a plate glass window because the man had been trying to nickel and dime him out of amounts of drive time pay (half the movers' dollar rate per hour, to and from the job). I'm not condoning his behavior but there is a tiny part of me, deeply buried and cheering *very loudly*, as I believe this was retribution for a lifetime of surreptitiously cheating employees out of chump change. I knew both men and would say it was a fair exchange of action ... and a fair exchange is no lie.*

William was polite to customers but always on the look out for the upper hand in a bargaining position where tips and freebies were concerned. He'd play the race card to tickle the customer's

guilty white prostate in order to elicit a reward they otherwise would not have considered. He played the “downtrodden, oppressed brother” effectively to many a shipper (jargon for “one being moved”) and would laugh to me about it.

“You know what I’m talking about, Artie. I mean, your British Empire raped and pillaged the earth for two centuries; I’m just redressing the balance a little ... in a poor black man’s deserving favor, of course.”

“Oh, *of course.*”

A sidelong smirk.

“So ... does that mean you’re not sharing the tip, Willy?”

“Oh, I erh, you ... sure. Sure thing!”

In the truck’s side view mirror, I saw him pocket the cash and was even directed by the customer to look out for my share. I knew it would not be forthcoming unless I mentioned it. He knew that I knew, yet we both said nothing.

GOTCHA. I smiled at the irony of the situation, considering the reason for Plate Glass Willy’s run in with his ex-employer.

One of his favorite periods in history was that of the Great British Empire. He was amazed that a small island could wield so much power. He surprised me with facts about the legal system, military battles, politics ... An avid watcher of *Prime Minister’s Question Time*: A portal of fifteen minutes or so, in which elected government representatives are allowed to grill their leader. It was televised by a US cable network. (At least it was in the early ‘90’s.) If you never saw the show, the most effective way I can describe it is “a verbal bare-knuckle fight.” UK politicians behave in a much less civilized manner than their US counterparts when it comes to accountability and public speaking. It was a free-for-all without the fisticuffs, and on TV. The Ultimate Reality Show. Alas, back in the day before that format became popular.

When Willy first encountered PMQT, he was, in the words of the Bard: *gobsmacked!* (Blown away.) He particularly loved to watch Margaret Thatcher when she held office. The way she dispatched allcomers to the throne of Queen Maggie was an art form. While stodgy suits from the opposition party attempted to bludgeon her with their politically biased agenda, she nimbly side stepped the blows and delivered stinging rebukes.

“I refer the right honorable gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago!”

He lurved that phrase:

“I refer the raght hon’able gennelman ... MAN, she’s got the right idea. Off with their heads. *Hee, hee, hee.* Man-Oh-Man-Oh-MAN.”

In the excitement, he’d shout and stamp his foot: *Off with their heads ... Off with their heads!*

I must admit I liked working with him. He was severe at first, but in time I got the Willy seal of approval. He was a good mover and taught me a bunch of stuff. His trademark phrase—when dealing with a heavy two man piece on a stairwell, picking and lifting on tiptoes to cut a tight 90 turn—*Dance with me, Artie, dance with me!* I remember as clear today, as when he first said it. He liked me well enough and there was an edgy banter between us, but he was not a man to be trifled with. I was under no illusion that I’d be sacrificed in a finger snap if it suited his plan. I’d seen his wrath manifest itself: A young mover had usurped Willy’s power on a job. Instead of checking in with driver Willy, he reported his concerns directly to the office (in effect going over Willy’s head). As a result, the move was taken out of Willy’s control. He was steaming. I know, I saw

vapor coming out of his ears. He confronted his Judas back at the yard. He picked him up under the jaw with one hand and pinned him to a wall, feet way off the ground. He scared the boy so bad, he was forever changed and never came back on the trucks. William puffed out his chest and told me in mock theatrical style.

“He’s come to LA to be an *actor*. David is an *Hactor*. He wants to be, an *Hactorrrr*—Fuckin’ Sissy.”

None of this kind of revelation was imparted to the customer, who was listening to our stories in a brief and highly sanitized fashion. I did not inform him that I was “normal,” but my crew mate had a hair trigger temper and was not afraid to use violence to his advantage.

“This is only a temporary job for me. I’m doing what I’m doing till I can get my music situation together; I’m just passing through, really.”

I went first. Willy ventured next.

“You know, I’ve been moving 29 years. I’m just doing it till I can decide what I really want to do ...” looks at me, with a twinkle in his eye, “I’m just passing through, too.”

GOTCHA BACK.

WHOOSH! What was that? *That was Life, Artie—just passing through.*

The boyfriend had now brought out some beers and was offering them around. Willy refused, as did I. We just wanted to get outta there; the customer was acting like we were old pals shooting the shit, relaxing with a brewski. Strange. Actually, it was not. It was creepy, *he* was creepy. Considering his situation, I thought he handled it in an overly cool manner. He could have been crazier than Willy. Just because he was pleasant to us, may not have reflected his relationship with Business Suit Babe in the bathroom. Like all serial killers, they have to be on their best behavior in order to get a foot in the door—they don’t introduce themselves with a big sign telling you what they’re up to.

By the time we left, the girlfriend still had not come out. The whole scenario was weird and there was no sympathetic pause where it would have been appropriate to ask *So ... how often does this happen? I mean your girlfriend leaving, without your knowledge, and taking all your furniture, that is?*

I could only speculate what their story was and what would happen next. MAN, this guy was good. He diffused a possibly explosive situation, shifting the focus away from “him and his” in a manner that would have been given the thumbs-up by Henry Kissinger—the Doctor of Diplomacy, himself.

As we drove back to the yard, the day’s events gave Willy and I plenty to energetically dissect. These were early days in moving for me. It had to be the strangest day in my life. So far. What a bunch of Whackos. I had no idea what lay ahead.

Analysis: No doubt some of Willy’s rage (towards the actor, David) was about a loss of power—especially, to someone he considered a pip-squeak—but it was more about the money. As a consequence of the young man’s action, another crew had been dispatched to help out and get the job done that day. Quicker. Therefore, less hours on the job for Willy. The Plate Glass Willy incident, the same: a loss of money.

If the customer did not buy lunch, he’d choose to eat the cheapest meal combos at the cheapest fast food places. He was uncomfortable if the only establishment nearby was a little pricey (a diner let’s say, with waitress service where a tip would be required). He’d get irrational, belligerent, sulky.

Movers are notoriously bad tippers, by the way—tho’ they complain, when they themselves are gyped—and Willy was Worst of the Worst.

I think *money*, for PGWilly, was of great symbolic significance. He came from a poor and, I suspect, violently abusive background. Hypothetically, if his parents had to work all hours to make ends meet, there’d be little time for the young Willy (attention/love). As an adult he was driven to work all hours, save like crazy, and put it all in the bank. Why? He neither spent it, nor invested in anything. He was a whisper away from hoarding dollar bills in his mattress. (I wouldn’t have put it past him if he did.) He didn’t trust a soul. Not even his wife.

“Bad things can happen when you don’t have money,” he told me once. He seemed to be speaking from experience. So ... a lack of money translates as a bad thing/a lack of love? And having money means security/feels like love? Money in the bank then, would sooth his pain. His “old” pain of feeling unloved.

Artie Q—we’ll learn about him in time.

Plate Glass Willy had the A code work ethic but his dishonest/violent shenanigans tarred him with a C swipe. Artie Q, type B.

*

An interesting footnote, here. A few years later, I was to work for the man who’d got the short end of the stick in his showdown with Plate Glass Willy. I was told the following story by one of the guys in the company ... maybe the two men weren’t so different.

The boss would go out and do estimates accompanied by his dog, tied by a length of rope, in the back of his pick up. It was a blistering noon-time bake when he stopped at a house to give a written quote. Forty minutes and he was done. He came out and took off in the truck. In time, he was flagged down by a motorist (honking his horn and flashing lights). As the man pulled alongside, he was frantically gesturing to the back of the pick up. While the boss had been inside filling out forms, Beethoven (all his dogs were named after classical dudes) jumped off the metal bed of the truck to seek a cool spot under the vehicle. Our man dragged the dog for half a mile or more, till it was a bloody mess. Completely unaware. After four days of paying veterinary hospital bills the boss pulled the plug on Beethoven’s medical coverage. The dog was left to do or die ... his solid Labrador constitution pulled him through and he lived for another ten years.

Beethoven and I shared many a quiet moment together as I filled out the paperwork at the end of a day. He slept at the office on a flea infested doggie cushion. He was a lovely dog (very good natured) who lived for affection, which he got from his terminally distracted master ... along with the occasional beating. Though I was horrified by the story, it didn’t surprise me. I too, was to have my encounters with the owner, though nothing as severe as PGWilly.

“He had it coming ... the cheap son of a bitch.”

A little rich coming from you, Willy.

* Be Bop Deluxe, British Rock Band. Song *Fair Exchange* by Bill Nelson, circa 1976

CHAPTER 2

Excessive Sweating

Moist Towelette Man

There are those who would say doing something physical in a hot climate, one is inclined to sweat. This is quite natural But ... *excessive sweating at the drop of a hat?* You've only got to catch sight of certain individuals merely looking at a couch and suddenly "*It's Raining, Men!*" I worked with a man who was not that hairy, by the way (you know, more hair = sweat glands plus per square inch = more volume produced. Well, my take anyway), yet he dripped so profusely that just a casual swipe of his arm against your own would leave you *bloody and bleeding*, so to speak.

He came from a neighboring moving company with a back handed recommendation.

"When he's good ... he's ... good."

They never finished the thought and *somehow* our guys never followed it up. The fact that they'd "let him go" should have warned us that something was well and truly up. To me, it was clear there was something his ex was not telling us.

"What's he like on a bad day, then? AND will he inform us ahead of time, if the day is gonna be good or bad? I mean, Come On Dude, you gotta ask these questions—it's dangerous out there."

I got an all-knowing finger-wagging from a smirking office manager to whom I'd expressed my concern.

"You are so cynical."

"Yeah, well I have every right to be. I've seen the damage done by amateurs sent to do a pro's job ... all because management didn't check up on references; you don't *let someone go* for no reason."

No longer quite so green, I was beginning to refine my moving skills. This was a good company and I had an amount of seniority and voice, here; sometimes the Suits needed to be told. As a worker in the trenches, I tended to err on the side of caution. On the trucks, a new crew member is guilty until proven innocent/under the microscope until validated. Companies however, always desperate for extra reliable guys, tend to suspend initial reservations. As management are not immediately affected they're inclined to give the new employee more than a fair chance to show his worth—sometimes to their and our cost: Carrying a heavy and expensive object the wrong way (not lifting properly and in sync with your partner) can, not only hurt you and him, but large insurance and workers comp claims are something no company wants. Yet the slight prospect of One Good Man can prove irresistible in spite of all warning signals ... I suspected the office was quietly salivating at the possibility of such a gift from the gods.

*

The first couple of weeks went by without incident or clanging of alarm bells and the crew's consensus was that he was proficient. New Dude had been tested, and was found not lacking. By

the third week we entered a heavy work load; I had forgotten my reservations, and by this time the man was no longer New, he was just Dude. The ill omen portended had not materialized.

It was Day Five of a seven day move for a home in Bel Air—two days each for the pack, load, and unload, and one for the unpack. The boys were busy setting up the truck and preparing the house as we began the first day of the unload: Lift gate down with a two sectional Melcher ramp in place (durable enough for the transportation of automobiles); wooden inclines and smaller ramps to cut the steps to the house, and wheel them furniture-puppies straight in; carpet runners and masonite (sheets of hard board) in position, safeguarding marble and tile floors; plastic mask—a roll of sticky film that protects stairs and carpet—throughout the house; all wood and metal banisters padded up; “Booties” were in reserve, to defend rugs against soiling by dirty moving sneakers; even a pre-gig walk through, to acquaint the movers with the layout of rooms and placement of furniture.

The man in charge of the crew was Bird Man, #1 driver (whom we shall meet in great detail, later). He kept the company on the cutting edge with all the latest toys, equipment, materials, and developments in the business. He ran a streamlined operation: one that took a little time to do the prep, but once in place, was like a military offensive storming the beaches.

Upon opening the back doors of the truck, the sound of birds, calls from nature, and daylight all streamed through the trees. The palatial house overlooking a reservoir was a sanctuary from the bustle of LA, light years away from a city that was just down the road. It was an early spring morning and there was a warmth in the air that made me feel glad to be alive. I couldn't resist a chuckle as I wondered what old friends in London were doing at that instant ...

“Probably freezing their balls off, Artie.”

Aah, to be in the present. Tomorrow, all this will be gone. How can I make this moment last?

“You can't. You just live. Enjoy. Savor every moment, sip each laugh and line.”

OK, that'll do nicely.

I surveyed the scene and took a beat to drink it all in.

Mmm, beautiful. I'm so happy to be here.

As I let go of the thought, I noticed Dude off to the side out of uniform. Strange, the company T shirt was light blue and his seemed dark with a sort of tie-die thing going on. *Hmh.*

First piece off the truck: a heavy leather sofa bed. This was indeed a piece to test the sure footed mettle of any mover, especially with no warming up. *Showtime!* Dude and I squared up. Though we wheeled it in on a four wheel dolly, we had to carry it up two flights of stairs and down a twisty turny passageway into a small den; difficult to maneuver, but he performed like a pro. To his credit there were no walls or doorways scuffed.

The somber tone of wood in the room was offset by rays of sunlight that sliced the air with almost tangible lines. We put the sofa down and stepped back to let the chatty lady of the house decide exactly where she wanted it placed. She was wittering on about being a designer in a former life; I started to drift. ...

“Look at this wood. This room would make a great library—bit ‘o stain here, stain there.”

Dude was nodding in agreement. Like he knew! Well, maybe he did.

“You see, if I position the couch here, the reddish brown of the leather will bring out the color on the wall.”

I was in my own private world.

I really wish I'd bought the Apricot Clif bar and not the Black Cherry, again. I never try anything new.

All this wannabe-designer chit chat was making me hungry, for Christ's sake. I returned to earth slowly. I observed my partner listening to her prattle. I was now completely present and focused. I stood in the shadows of the room while Dude was fully in the light, next to the window. Thoughts were forming in my head. Signals were being sent and clues processed, as I switched attention from the shirt to his head, and back again. I'm not sure at what point I realized I was open mouthed, gawking at the one inch strip of light blue that ran around the bottom—it was in fact, a dry section of material—and the whole mass of his upper body was drenched and steaming ... *steaming* in the a.m. sunlight. The dark and the light blue presented a virtual wet/dry optical illusion: Which is which? I felt an epiphanous revelation about to burst forth on a ready and waiting consciousness. Now I remembered my earlier tie-die observation. I stepped into the glow of realization; it was like I had discovered a new theory in physics.

Artie Q's Principle of Perspiration: As sweating increases, so the area that is dry, decreases.

The light blue of the company T shirt turned dark when completely wet. And Dude was almost out of dry. He was now wiping a beaded forehead with the neck of his shirt and in turn using his hand, which he then smeared on an already doused T. Talk about overflow! It was like pouring liquid into an already full container. There was nowhere for his sweat to go, but he repeated his wiping procedure many times. Suddenly, the sun disappeared as Dude moved into its path and I now saw him in silhouette.

“The couch will no longer be centered if we put the end table ...” A droplet of sweat appeared on the tip of his nose, and the *blow* of the p-popping sound on the word “put” launched the drip into the air—a tiny human cannonball described it's perfect arc and hit the deck. As soon as it left his nose, another appeared, and another, and another ... it was a plumber's drip.

Dr. Artie's physics lesson continues: Q's Quantitative Law of Moistly Quitting Quota.

He was leaking from the inside out and spots of wet were appearing on the floor. I wondered if the customer had noticed; she did not remark however, and seemed lost in contented thought regarding where the couch had come to rest. As Dude and I retrieved our furniture pads from the sleeper my arm barely brushed his own, but that was enough. It was so wet and slimy (yes, slimy) afterwards that I felt I needed to take a shower.

Jesus. It's not as though I had sex with the man; I just carried a couch with him.

Urghhh! First piece of the day and my arm was glazed with the slime of another man. I had been violated and wanted to scrape the flesh, cut off my limb and disinfect the area. Instead, I withdrew and wiped it discreetly on the pad. Dr. Q had to flee his laboratory at this point.

Similar incidents were occurring and the sightings of wet spotted clusters were up. Our early weeks with him were easy; now, the workload was beginning to stack up. God knows what would happen in the Summer months.

In order to stem the flow, he started carrying a hand towel out of his back pocket, and on occasion wore it fashionably around his neck—the state of this rag at the end of a day's play! *And* he had bad body odor: A smell that was dark and dank and reeked of ill health, accompanied by endless diet cokes and cigarettes. Worse still was the fact he was an educated man, an ex-school teacher ... didn't he know better? Couldn't he have done something?—Worn a protective rubber suit? Stood alone in a huge, open space? Killed himself at the next available opportunity? Discreetly placed the

always damp and fetid hand towel out of sight? Something. Anything!

He left it on a job once, but none of us had the courage to pick it up and hand it back. Instead we played games: chased round the truck, threatening one another with it on the end of a stick. One of the guys put it on my head while I was carrying a dresser. It was all I could do to hold my breath till we put the piece down. I then dashed to the bathroom to scrub my head raw (one of the advantages being bald) but somehow the stink lingered. Throughout the day I kept rubbing my head under the pretense of scratching, and subtly smelling my hand for mark of the devil's taint. I would zone out and come-to, sniffing like a hound, uncertain whether the smell was still on me. After a good long soak that night I exorcised the demon stench. Finally.

*

Moist Towelette Man's seemingly only friend in life was a small white dog; it traveled with him at all times. During the day he left it in the car with a window cracked open. At the end of the job he would bring it out for a little R&R. As the honeymoon period wore off at work MTM's real personality began to seep through. He was a dour man given to occasional outbursts of intense frustration with himself ... but everything changed when he saw his dog—his love so apparent, so tender, that a long forgotten smile would return and his eyes became moist. Moist Towelette Man, indeed.

I remember stroking the dog once (that *doggy breath* happening as I rubbed it's belly) and slowly, peripherally, sensed the presence of MTM's warm and dripping face an inch from my own, beaming down at his Beloved, wiping sweaty palms on the now ever-present cloth. *Yeowww!* That smell. Him or the Dog? Or the Towel? I couldn't work it out; talk about guilt by association. Like father like son—Dot Fuckin Com—Isn't there some fashionable coffee table theory that dog owners start to resemble their pets, after a while? Poor dog ... with thick pebble glasses and a bald head, too.

Having come from a world that was steeped in theory, MTM found himself trying to communicate in a world that he was almost not equipped to deal with. It is true that he'd come from another moving company but (as we later found out) that was his first ... and he didn't last long. His job description there was in a foreman-like capacity (directing others, rather than *doing*), and here he was under pressure *to do* rather than direct. He got waylaid by the semantics of language and was frequently defending his erudite choice of words to some of the less educated guys who felt sure they were being made fun of. The word "compulsory" (UK speak for mandatory) came up in conversation and there ensued a 15 minute debate with himself about words and their origins. Inappropriately guffawing at seemingly little in particular, it was both comical and scary to see a man, usually so stern, grow playful and animated; thing is ... it was only ever with himself. Having been stung by many, he retreated into the world of self and animals for love and companionship.

He was further alienated as few chose to partner up and carry "two-man items" because of the Yuck Factor—The Fear of Being Slimed.

One of the recent trends in the safety of transporting furniture is to cover the piece with a pad and then shrink-wrap the pad to the item. The end result is "bulletproof" and "safe to throw down a flight of stairs." Basically, this wrap is a stronger, extra large version of the household variety. When an item is bulky and difficult to grab, the tackiness of the plastic film allows the mover to really get a grip ... unless of course, moisture is involved. *AHA!* Then it becomes slippery; things get dropped—especially by those who profusely perspire in perpetuity. They have become in this

technological age, accident prone. Maybe they always were, only now more so. As our company favored the use of this plastic wrap it was hardly surprising that MTM became more damage-inclined, and so the angry displays were more frequent—he frazzled himself into a saturated mass. He was forced to face the truth ... he did not have The Mover’s Touch.

I don’t know what brought him to LA in the first place; certainly it was not career, love of showbiz, or the healthy SoCal lifestyle—a more bookish aesthete, so completely unsuited to shorts and long black socks, I’ve not met—but as personal life and work began to crash around him, he moved back east and got himself an office job.

In a sense, I knew it all along. I felt validated with regard to my premonition. There’s something to be said for giving a man a fair shake and not being too judgmental, but when intuition repeatedly speaks: listen and feel. Intuition is not the sole property of women. It is the result of the human sensory-aerial remarking, detecting, collating shards of information; though not having the time, distance, nor dare I say “ability” to properly analyze and compute said info ... or something like that anyway. Needless to say, the smug office manager was dealt with by my own kind of (middle) finger-wagging.

Moving Skills

As I have touched on a point, I’d like to explain further. Within local moving there are two divisions: Drivers and helpers. Drivers load and drive the truck; helpers bring furniture to the driver. That is fundamentally how it works. Drivers are in charge and responsible for the job, and so, get paid more. There is a small percentage of those who do both. I was in that group—happy to work as a helper, and also at home with the duties of being a driver. MTM was a diligent and concerned employee, but a hard worker does not necessarily make a good mover. Nor even one who is competent; a hard worker with the best intentions can still destroy every stick of furniture in the house. He may not have the ability or patience to learn how to be an effective mover.

Performance grading is in four stages: The first—those who are Just Plain God Awful; most of the population are OK or Adequate; some are Good Movers; and then ... there are Great Movers, those blessed by the Almighty. A Good Mover excels in one, two or maybe three of the skills. A Great Mover—One sanctioned from Above—is grade A, every department. In a lifetime you can count on one hand who will be among the Chosen Few.

- Strength and endurance alone won’t give you God’s Touch in Moving. You need experience when dealing with antique and unusual shaped furniture; knowing where and where-not to apply pressure, and how to transport the piece without damage.
- A mover kissed by the Sacred Hand will come complete with dexterity, sure footedness, and peripheral vision when backing up a circular staircase with a load from hell, or hanging off a ledge on the side of a balcony—while hoisting an armoire too large to go through the front door.
- Heavenly influence is definitely present in the ability to stay sharp and focused throughout the eight hour load of a tractor trailer or storage space (from floor to ceiling/front to back) and not waste one cubic inch of space.
- A sublime gift: the “estimator’s eye.” Certainly a plus, coming up with a dollar amount that is both attractive to the customer, competitive with other companies, and realistic when unforeseen circumstances arise causing a job to overrun it’s time frame.

- Packing is one aspect of moving that many macho mover types consider too sissy a job, but it is all part of the equation. Skilled and divine handling is essential in order that the irreplaceable 24 piece stemware collection arrives in tact with no chips or cracks.
 - People skills: a quality often overlooked. Mandatory! Discretion and resolve in the face of an uncooperative or distracted shipper as an estimate is spiraling out of control. Leadership and delegation—with helpers who'd rather be smoking a joint or drinking beer—all courtesy of the Absolute.
 - Finally, to complete the qualifications of entry into the Supreme School of Moving and Storage Hall of Fame—an extra special bag of innate tricks, unique to that pilgrim and one that others can only imitate. Indefinable magic: The way he flips a couch on end or carries three book boxes on his back up a flight of stairs, like it's no big deal. Maybe it's the style with which he moves a baby grand piano, all by his lonesome! That elusive set of characteristics that moving legends are built upon, that create tales to tell buddies around an open camp fire while passing around a bottle of moonshine ... leaving wizened old movers shaking heads in disbelief.
- My next guest in line was in no way a candidate for the Hallowed Halls. He was also not a Good Mover. He was OK ... a hard worker though. *Oh-Oh!*

Bandanna Man

Bandanna Man would wrap a cut up strip of company T shirt around his head and have a long length hanging down the side like Stallone's Rambo. 6' 3", 240 lbs, with a rolling flat footed gait, and John Wayne Walking Shoulders made him appear to list and fall like a ship in a storm. Every so often he'd whip off that bandanna with a *crack and spray* like he was snapping someone's butt in a shower, and wring it out. He was a big, strong man with a lot of *wring*—this man could perspire. There's no doubt that he toiled hard and when he did, his blue clothing turned dark. Not a dry eye in the house. His wet T hung stiff as a board. No tie-die effect here.

There's an old adage: *You get more mileage out of an angry mover*—I'd agree with that. Anger is clearly a high octane fuel on which to run, especially in a creative or manual work environment—Juice for the engine/Food for the fire—it somehow gives a man a little extra oomph. You can almost see the productivity increase when he comes to work with that tense furrowed brow-thing going on, muttering personal paranoid conspiracies under his breath. I mean, forget: Did you get your wheaties, today? Give me a delusional, psychotic man with a head full of mind-babble for breakfast, anyday.

“Yeehahhh. Load up that truck, mover. Wind him up ... and let him loose!”

At the start of many a job, Bandanna would have a Yeats Appliance Dolly (a 2 wheel dolly complete with strap—primarily for the transportation of refrigerators, washers, dryers etc.) loaded up with anything other than appliances.

“Watch out! Overworked and underpaid mover coming through.” Sweating up a storm and leaving drenched souls reeling in his wake. *Gerjung! Gerjung! Gerjung! Gerjung!*—the sound of dolly on step; bumping and grumbling feverishly down stairs, he'd wake up all within earshot with his crazy “Hey look at me, I'm working hard” work ethic. Proudly slapping stacks of cartons that he'd brought from house to truck, with a side ways look comparing the amount of work he'd done with that of others. Yep, the boss can certainly get a lot of plus from one boiling mad and crazy guy.

Well, BD was that man. Full of the injustices of life, who knows what his pain was, but undoubtedly it was the source of his Juice.

He was a tough cookie who cut his moving teeth working in poor neighborhoods and busting his hump for every cent before realizing that if he progressed to the gravy jobs—companies servicing nice upper-middle class folk—life would be so much sweeter. With a degree in “street,” no one was going to pull the wool over this moving brother’s eyes.

Bandanna Man was often stopped by the police outside the work environment for “no apparent reason.” On any morning in the yard, he could be found, arms way out wide in a who me?/crucifix pose, holding forth on last night’s “completely unfounded” stop and search to an audience of movers who’d heard it all, many times before.

“Man, they jus lookin for shit to hang on a brother.”—Why had the cops stopped him? Did they find anything? Was there a previous record? None of which was ever disclosed. It is unlikely that someone who’d established himself as suspect in many areas at work would be a model citizen in his private life. If money went missing on a job, he was involved. (His eventual demise from the firm.) One time, the company was using up vast amounts of T shirts that, *surprise*, turned up in the trunk of his car as cut up rags for the wax job, and bandannas for his sweltering brow. ...

The Bandanna and I

It was a long day, for a customer relocating from apartment to condo. She was going up in the world, quite literally—from second floor rental to a Penthouse suite, with a heady skyscraper view of Malibu and the Santa Monica Bay; to way down south past LAX, El Segundo power station, and onto Manhattan Beach and beaches beyond ... on a clear day, that is. Beautiful. Plan of action: Two guys working the apartment; two on the elevator; and another couple ferrying stuff between truck and building. I was running the elevator with Bandanna Man. There was a weird dynamic between us; it was the first time we’d worked together as equals—helpers, that is. As drivers are used to taking charge, some find it an uncomfortable transition to make, if required to work in the lesser capacity of a helper. (Bottom line: being told what to do.) I had no problem with this arrangement and really rather enjoyed the freedom it accorded. Some helpers however, feel a need to flex their muscles and remind their new workmates (drivers) that they’re now just part of the gang—nothin’ special. We got along pretty well, but I noticed he had this passive aggressive way of letting me know when I did things in a manner of which he didn’t approve; he made his point by *tutting* and “making a face” at the way I’d stacked boxes, or exhaling loudly and repositioning a piece on a four wheel dolly (that I had arranged for best transportation). Anyway, he really couldn’t say too much as I had seniority over him, and at 5’ 8”/145 lbs, I decided to let it all slide.

A slog of an unload—there was no freight elevator reserved for us, so we had to share with the public—up and down in a slow moving car, from lobby to penthouse. BD was in pretty good spirits and wearing that soggy sheen of his: *Look at me, I’m working hard!*

A couple of hot chicks got in with us.

Hmm, BD is One for the Ladies. Who’d a thunk it?

“How you doin’ today, senioritas? Lobby, goin all the way up.”

A real charmer, too. Bandanna was now Bell Hop Man ... that’s to say, a drenched bell hop man complete with Rambo sweat rag. The girls exchanged a look that prompted a frantic display of

button pushing. The slightly shabby look of the crew was testament to the fact there was a shortage of T shirts at the office. A strange thought took shape and slipped from my mouth before I could—
“You know, dude. If you sew all your bandannas and shop rags together, you’ve got a bunch of company T shirts.”

Many elevators in LA carry a sign which I can only describe as Completely Bizarre. The wording goes something like:

IF THIS CAR BECOMES INOPERABLE ...

“Second floor, going up.”

Bandanna Man leaned in with a slight lisp.

“You a pretty funny guy, Aur-Tie, aincha?”

Hello! He was doing that head swiveling move. The one I’d noticed in the yard which accompanied the arms-out-wide/innocent MO, but the presence of babes kept a lid on his reaction. He was talking to me (side ways out of his mouth) while checking them out on the rotation swing. He was smiling, but that was not his tone.

DO NOT BECOME ALARMED ...

“Floor six.”

I felt like MTM, having to defend my choice of words. He bent closer, confiding.

“You know, I can’t be too sure about what you think you saw, but strange things can happen when people see too much.”

His rag was swinging and dripping. I’m sure the girls thought him a “real catch.”

PRESS BUTTON MARKED “ALARM”—*Huh?*

“Floor 9, onwards and upwards.”

Huddled in the opposite corner, as far away as physically possible, the girls were giggling and cringing at Bell Hop Man who was swinging, dripping, and announcing floors ... I was trying to get my thoughts in order—*maybe I should press the Alarm button?*

WAIT IN ELEVATOR CAR UNTIL HELP ARRIVES.

Err, help, Help? HELLLLLLP!

“Floor 12 ... and ... we’re ... stopping.”

The pendulum head swing came to rest on me. The girls swished their way out of the car. He leaned over and hit the Stop button. His arm was still up and I was cornered. The golden tooth grin was now gone.

“Why don’t you just forget what you saw in the trunk?”

He raised his eyebrows and waited.

Jesus, I wonder if he’s going to bitch snap me with his sopping rag?

He waited one considerable beat ... then snorted and clasped me on the shoulder.

“Ah was jus fuckin wich ya. Hah! You know, you all right, Artie ... AUR-TIE, YEAH!”

Punching the elevator release with a kind of high-five energy, he slapped his thigh and leered.

“Penthouse. We’re, Here.”

Wohhhh. Armpits a little damp there, Artie? AUR-TIE.

I tried to laugh, but it sounded phony. I imagined I knew what the Ray Liotta character felt like in *Good Fellas* when he reacted to Joe Pesci’s psycho line “I almost had you going, there.”

Yeah, you’re damn right, dude.

Bandanna Man had a sense of humor. Who knew?

Maple Leaf Bob—“A Slippery Customer”

Hands that sweat of their own accord? Palmer Hyper Hydrosis: Abnormally sweaty palms due to over active nerves. Apparently, it's a recognized medical condition. Or, as Artie Q MD would diagnose, “his condition is due to an Abnormally High Annoyance Factor.” Hey, Dr. Q back in the lab again!

The always argumentative/never dependable Big Bob (or Big Blob, as some would say) was another font of human fluid. Bob's seeping specialty were his hands—more precisely, the palms. To say he had a set of paws that would make your skin crawl would be an understatement. They were always tepid and damp ... a grip you could grow algae in. Receiving his hand shake was akin to the MTM experience: the slime element.

He was a giant of a man in girth and height and it seemed like he lost his weight in sweat everyday, and gained it back with beer and pizza. As his eating prowess increased, so his mental powers shrank. A prototype of the public's image of a bumbling mover and more, the Blob-ster was ever ready to argue but never able to take responsibility for the ill effects of his poorly thought out suggestions. He was involved in many a moving mishap.

A recurring theme among my dripping coworkers was the victim mentality and it certainly played a part, here. Stuff that happened was never his fault, no matter how incriminating the evidence. Inexplicable damage to furniture that only he could have done ... a complete mystery.

The company offered a bonus plan to it's workers: Five per cent of a mover's total wages, extra, at the end of every month ... so long as there were no damages. Any casualties incurred on his watch would be deducted from his pile. The scheme was established to encourage fewer accidents and more responsibility. In actuality, the reverse happened—a lot of finger pointing went on. In order that people's stashes should not be garnished; if there were no witnesses, there was no reason for the guilty party to own up. As a result, innocents—usually, drivers—were ultimately held responsible. Even when miscreants were caught dead to rights (eyewitnesses present) they tried to wiggle out, somehow. So this added a sour note into the equation. Of course, the bonus plan was popular among the boys; unfortunately, it turned mild mannered souls into penny pinching liars ... the amount of damages on jobs, by the way, did not go down.

I was driver that day. I watched Bob approach me with a broken lamp and a mouth full of bagel.

Mmm, I think this speaks for itself.

I was fascinated as to how he'd explain this one.

“The lamp got broke.”

Hmh. Oh-kay.

Nice lamp, too. Notice the choice of words, here. I knew where this was going. It was all about the 5%.

“How d'it get broken?”

“Well, I was in the room see, and Jesús here, calls me over to look at this book he's packing. It claims OJ was a member of the Masonic lodge. I knew he—”

“Dude, did you break the lamp?”

“Well, like I was saying, Jesús—”

“W, w, w, w, w ... *Who* broke the lamp?”

I could not get a straight answer, and the more I questioned, the more he bobbed, weaved, and showered me with breakfast. The Blob-ster was a complete buffoon, but sharp as a tack when it came to Blame and Bonus. He realized he could wear me down by fudging; after an amount of time, I'd had enough and waved the Big Blob away. I looked down at my shirt.

Ah, so you had cream cheese with that bagel. Fuck. There goes my five percent again. What a dick. I spoke to Jesús, the helper who'd been present in the room with Bob. For him, the facts were clear.

"Bob broke the lamp, dude. He dropped it. It *slipped*. ..." He gave me a look.

Jesús repeated his testimony to management. It was the least he could do. Bob was a scumbag who'd burned other movers regarding their bonuses. Jesús had been a victim, and this was payback; an expensive lamp with a stained glass lampshade, priced at \$325. Poor ol' Bob. I got to keep my 5%, after all.

YES! No wiggling out of this one, Bob. Blob-ster.

Why is it so difficult to say I broke the lamp and yet so easy to point the finger at others?

*

It was the first I'd heard of a mere mortal being called Jesús. He was from South America. Effectively, his devout family had named their child *Son of God*. I was familiar with Moses, Abraham, and other prominent biblical dudes, however I'd assumed that "Jesus" would have been out of bounds—especially for the religious. I remember our introduction.

"Hey man. Jesús."

We shook hands.

"Artie. You mean as in Jesus?"

"Yeah, but in my country, we say, *Jay-sus*."

"Oh! Hey-Zeus."

"You got it, man."

Whatever next? Jesús introducing his biological father as God, "only we pronounce it *Yod*."

"But you know here in America, your name is Jesus: Son of God. Right?"

"Yeah, I know."

I marveled at the thought of anyone from white Anglo Saxon heritage in America, daring to name their son Jesus. I mean, it just would not happen. Heads would roll. It still makes me smile. I ended up calling Jesús, J Man.

*

Before the use of shrink wrap on jobs, Blob was the cause of this memorable upholstery casualty. While carrying a heavy sofa under difficult circumstances, his copious stream of sweat penetrated the furniture pad at gut level and left a beautifully shaped maple leaf stain on the customer's tan, suede, and (oh, by the way) Very Expensive Couch. Now that's through his T-shirt, through the company's heavy duty X-large sweat shirt, and finally, one regulation strength industrial moving pad. They never really got rid of the stain, even after two professional cleanings. Nice! Classic quote of the year—"Wasn't me." Delivered in true treble-chin-jiggling style denial, even in the light of damning evidence. Henceforth, known as Maple Leaf Bob.

A surprising thing to note. Given his extreme wash of digit deluge, where were the two hand prints that should have been on either side of the main "ink-devil" stain. Vanished, or never there in the first place?

Analysis: There was always a problem of one sort or another with my saturated moving brothers—diseased, criminal, violently angry ... one guy was a driver who hid smaller damages by throwing them off the truck, on route to the unload, and then pleading ignorance at their disappearance. Another, a gang banger, was arrested while on a moving job (having shot a guy in the head *the night before!*). Always a problem. Once again, I am not talking about a healthy perspiration due to physical labor. More like, not only had the man taken a shower and not dried off; he'd also bathed and come straight to work.

My point is this: Excessive Sweating seems to accompany a turbulent lifestyle. Is it a symptom—a physical manifestation of anger, anxiety, hopelessness, and/or whatever else is churning away inside? Primal Pain? Who knows? Who cares? Just don't rain on me, *please*.

MTM was not in the toothless trailer trash category of the C type. Also, definitely not a type A or B. He was an unfortunate, along with a chronically unstable ex-wife who wouldn't let go; a dog that was given constant human companionship; a family that put the F U in dysfunctional; and many seemingly insoluble calamities (domestic and foreign), academically elevated but too long out of the management loop and not able to procure a suitable job; as such, fell through the cracks and ended up ... moving pieces of wood from one room to another. *Ouch!* Maybe I should create another category. Type D—VICTIMS: Apply here.

Though Bandanna Man and Maple Leaf Bob could be included in this new category, they were essentially C types.

CHAPTER 3

Rage And Silence

The Artist

He was North Hollywood's answer to Paco De Lucia, renowned flamenco guitarist. On stage, he would sit in the classical style: one foot raised to support his instrument; long blond hair falling sweaty in his face. He did not look at the audience, except perchance through the matted locks, as he raised a glass of wine to his lips. Had people glimpsed beneath the hair, they would have seen an expression that was both painful and ecstatic. Then again, people never saw.

He neither spoke, nor sang one word during a performance. He hardly moved during a one hour set, other than hands and head shaking in time to the intense flourish of notes that were wrung from his guitar. Melodies, structured phrases, and improvised sections peppered each song with the very fiber of his soul.

He was a talented player fusing an array of complex styles. He played with the heaviest strings, frequently out of stock/always on order. He struck them harder than most and routinely broke one (or more) per show. Every note mattered and he played like a madman—a Whirling Dervish without the motion, yet driven by that same frenzied energy—as if those were his last moments on earth. It was essential to be the best at all times and if he were to expire by the end of the song, if the audience's only snapshot of him was that final hurrah, that would be enough.

It was not until he stood that he revealed his build: tall, slim, yet muscular. Broad shoulders squeezed into a close fitting matador jacket, pants pulled way up tight around a slender waist—giving him the look of a lot of leg and little body. Though there was a hint of something feminine (maybe the hair, the clothes that outlined every nook and cranny, or the overly poised and pursed-lipped manner in which he sat), he was regardless, a real hunk. Imagine the guitar hero of Antonio Banderas' *El Mariachi*, only with a blond mane, and there you have him ... an exotic creature.

This was indeed a contrast to the man standing beside him on stage also playing acoustic guitar (though in his case, singing and strumming basic chords). Here, was no gorgeous faced guitar-god. This man was small and compact with close cropped hair and a cheeky, winning way. He was easy in his communication with the audience and uninhibited in a bluesy-pop singing style. *Rage & Silence*, as they were called, would finish a show and invariably someone would approach with the consensus.

“Oh, I see. You're *Rage*, and ... wait a minute, let me guess ... you're *Silence*. *Right?*”

What few people knew, was that he was both *Rage and Silence*. The name of the act was coined by his songwriting partner after the two moods of *El Virtuoso*. Ironically, even our man (Mr. RnS) did not know the truth; he just thought it a great name. *Rage & Silence*, a perfect dichotomous visual of the two men.

His two passions in life were on that stage: playing the guitar and drinking red wine. Vast amounts

of red. And, while we're at it—white wine, beer, gin, vodka, whiskey, tequila, martini, liqueur ... in fact, *anything* alcoholic he could get his hands on. All and in any order, down the hatch. I have never seen anyone drink so many different types of alcohol during the course of an evening and still play a set of music relatively unaffected. Amazing. Especially so, as the next morning he had to go to work ... as a mover.

“The movers are here. *Movers!*”

That was where I met him.

The Mover

I know it was brutal for him playing a gig the night before, doing what he felt was a true calling (performing *and* drinking) and then moving furniture the next day. A rude awakening.

He cut a particular figure at work, too. He'd never wear shorts or the company T, but favored a thick hooded sweat shirt and pants, even in temperatures of 100+. The sweat shirt principle was a triple whammy: Long punishing workdays—sometimes with the hood down/boxing style—would refresh the body and soul (“Clean out the toxins from the night before, Artie.”); the workout helped keep the figure svelte and toned; in addition, he feared the effects of sun damage to his lilly white skin. For those areas the sweats did not cover, he applied a sun block/moisturizer generously to guard face and hands. To further protect his #1 concern, a pair of durable gauntlets were used on the harsh aspects of a move (dirty patio furniture, plants, garden paraphernalia, garage misc., truck ramps, etc.). Practical, though a tad pretentious ... had the gauntlets been worn by a knight preparing to joust, they would have been only *slightly* out of place because of the material, certainly *not* because of the look.

He believed the glove-ware/hooded ensemble to be just the ticket for any moving gig/any climate; to a 3rd Party, he would have appeared simply overdressed and hot.

RnS would never eat on a job, even if the customer bought lunch, choosing to wait for a healthy evening meal. He drank only distilled water from a gallon jug and on occasion would buy a malt beer at lunchtime. (I suspect to keep the jitters at bay.) He was in trouble at the start of a job, once—hands trembling and face pale, shining with a heavy glaze ... a skinful of booze? An overdose of moisturizing cream? Well, both actually. Add to the mix a heavy-lidded “look right through you” stare and a splash of sweat on the top lip, shake vigorously and voila: a present but absent demeanor that was downright scary.

Hey, Pale Face. Anyone home? Hellooooo ...?

He was a vain man (way more so than most) and had embarked on the electrolysis-style removal of facial hair, but ran out of money an inch above his Adam's apple. That morning saw him silent and vacant as the remaining tell tale line of whiskers started to inch their way forward, as if screaming *what about me?* for another \$1,000 to finish the job.

We pulled up in front of the House of the Day; I could see he was struggling.

“Why don't you let me go through the paperwork with the customer? Get yourself sorted.”

I was in the truck when he returned, a little later. He shuffled to the side (where panels allow furniture to be tied down) and rested forehead against wood.

“So ... everything, cool?”

I supposed I was waiting for an answer. I wasn't quite sure. I tried to look but couldn't see;

anything could be going on behind the hair. There was a quiet knocking sound ... he was rocking back and forth against the panel. I waited half-smiling, expecting a funny line or something. Then I noticed the mandatory paper bag. This was a first—drinking on the trucks.

“I see you got yourself something a little stronger than Starbucks, dude.”

“That’ll wake you up in the mornin’, boys.” In a voice so low, he mouthed a favorite line from the movies. Gradually, the contents of the brown bag returned him to the land of functioning and “reporting for duty.” On reflection, it should have been one of the many cautionary signs to give a wide birth to our developing friendship.

*

Over the years I socialized with him outside the work environment. I supported his musical endeavors, as he did mine. He played on a couple of my recorded tracks; I watched him perform live. I made fun of his mannered playing style: choosing to sit like the flamenco masters, rather than stand.

“Hey, Flamenco Boy.”

“Techno Man ... Wassup?”

I liked him when he wasn’t the “wild-eyed absentee of the morning after.” He could be witty, playful, almost tender. He was a generous host to friends when he had the dough, and though his work schedule was sketchy, credit shot, and cash flow always an issue—he was never without a glass of wine. (Almost always red.) He respected my opinion and seemed to like me. I found out how much after a particular night of drunken revelry. “I’d take a bullet for you, man.” I was bemused at the sudden change of pace; I wasn’t even sure I’d heard him right. But I did. I looked over for the visual and as quickly as the emotion had come, it disappeared in a trice, as if embarrassed at letting his guard down ... or something. *Hmm?* It was an uncommonly candid moment, and in time I came to understand the significance of the terms he’d used—a flash back to a surprisingly violent past that plagued his dreams, turned them into nightmares, and jolted him awake in a cold sweat. Open mouthed and silent-shrieking.

Flamenco Boy—Legendary Shenanigans

We didn’t work together much (he was a driver, as was I) but his antics were legendary. The stuff that after-dinner show-stopping yarns are made of.

The management had a problem scheduling him. They said he was unreliable and tried to rein in his erratic work ethic, but he was an unbridled force that would not be corralled. He’d work two or three days, then disappear for a week or two. He’d reappear without any excuse, desperate for cash, and as moving companies are ever in need of competent drivers, they’d accept him back. Reluctantly though.

He was engaging with the public and could pour on the charm, but would turn on a dime if they were rude or testy. He believed a firm hand was required when dealing with an unreasonable customer. There was the odd confrontation at the start of a job. Men or women: used to taking charge; not packed and ready to move; or a little *too* specific in their needs from a mover—he’d let them know immediately what to expect. If they complained, off he’d go. No discussion. Wouldn’t even start the job. I was called in more than once to cover a gig that Flamenco Boy had walked off. I began to recognize a pattern, here. As he hated the fact that he earned his living from moving, and

not music, he did the bare-minimum to skate by. His needs were modest, and once he'd made his money for the month, he'd vanish. I suspected that if he'd given his word to work and then realized he'd already reached his existence quota, he'd get short tempered and resentful. The only reason he needed to walk off a job was if he took an instant dislike to the shipper, and no entreaties from the office could change his mind; however, Flamenco never pulled this stunt when funds were low.

On an occasion when he'd decided to walk out on a "*real bitch*, Artie," the news of possible conflict had been discussed by the packing crew from the day before. In the office, they'd described the woman as "demanding and unreasonable" ... maybe Mr. RnS was not the best candidate to move her? Management was in a tight spot: no one else available. So they crossed their fingers and hoped for the best.

Things went badly from the outset—shipper and mover got into it first thing. She dove straight into complaining about minor details of the pack job. *Said they'd do this/didn't do that/me, me, me/wah, wah, wah!* What she didn't know was that Flamenco Boy had reached his target wage for the month. He was sporting his classic morning-after hue and was in no mood for protracted petty-wrangling.

"Listen, I am not part of the packing crew ... that was yesterday. Today, I am here to move you. Now, do you want me to stay or leave? You decide. I *really* don't care."

Normally, this stock response from our man cooled the heels of many a prickly pear. The chances of getting a replacement mover on-the-day is unlikely. So it shifts the balance of power to the mover and things calm down. Usually. Still in complaint mode however, she called in to bitch at the company. Flamenco received a call from the office urging calm, only to catch a remark of hers in the background. That was it—he'd had enough. He was being attacked on both sides now and just came unglued.

"Don't you fucking talk like that to me ... she's a cunt ... *a fucking stinking whore!* ... *no one tells me what to do ... NO ONE!*"

He was alternately shouting at her, then at the office via the telephone. He started hammering the phone up and down on it's cradle. Up and Down. Then he held the phone by the mouthpiece, to get more leverage—more bang for his buck, you might say—and still screaming obscenities, began to renew his assault on the machine for a full ten seconds; his long hair rocking back and forth as he smashed it into oblivion. (His Oblivion.) Finally it all subsided, and everyone (movers and customer) was frozen, silent and shocked. Well, it is shocking when someone wigs out to the N'th degree in a relatively unprovoked manner. Flamenco Boy came-to holding the receiver (resplendent with dangling earpiece) and put it down gently. One finger remained on the phone and he paused, confused, as if considering: *How did this come to be damaged. Hmh?* ... and with a prissy flick of his head he sniffed, "OK, I'm off."

The office had to mop up that mess, and I'm not sure what happened next. I only know that after repeated attempts to admonish his behavior, they were met with a nonplused mover who was unrepentant.

"She deserved it," was all he would say.

They put him on suspension, which suited him just fine—time off to play the guitar, drink red wine, *and* ... he'd made his money mark. *Nice!* I approached him afterwards.

"So, dude. That's what you call a *firm hand* when dealing with the public is it? Jesus!"

He was looking away, leaning on elbows with a “quiet” finger on puckered lips, but his eyes flashed at me and smirked.

There were other incidents, though not as extreme. One traffic occurrence saw him blocking a guy and his car in, with a 26' moving truck. Leaping like a gazelle onto the hood of the vehicle, he dared the driver to *get out and face it like a man*.

All right, all right. I take that back—the extreme reference, that is. You (God forbid, Dear Reader) are in a small car, late for work. You do something silly to get by a moving van. I mean it's big and slow and ... anyway, it's over; you didn't do it on purpose. No harm. No foul. SUDDENLY, the big truck pulls in front of you, at an angle, taking up two lanes of highway. Now you're stuck. Out gets Tarzan with a shock of hair and he's on the hood of your car.

“Oh my God, he's on the—”

“You have no fucking idea who you're fucking dealing with ... get out ... *GET OUT!*”

Another time, I was with him in the truck and he asked me to pull over, and disappeared. I found myself zoning out, hitting the seek button on the radio, looking across the road into a group of shops—stationery/liquor store/*Oh look, a Thai place. I wonder if it's any good?*—a bunch of random thoughts, really. On the other side of the street a man had gone into the paper store, vaulted the counter, and confronted an employee. He seemed to be threatening him with a series of finger-jabbing motions. Familiar locks were swaying as if giving prominence to certain words. The aggressor then grasped his victim by the shirt, hauled him forward and spat in his face ... for one tiny moment the world stood still. He held him close, eyeball to eyeball, allowing the employee to feel his rage, and thrust him back against a wall—*dispatched* in the contemptuous manner one would flick away a loathsome insect! Even at a distance I could see the guy was terrified. That was all it took. The man with the hair turned on his heel and marched out. Mission Accomplished.

“You see Artie, the Art of the Threat is quite simple. Never threaten anyone. Beat 'em to death, *then* dare them to do it again.”

Stationery Guy had been mildly sexually harassing Flamenco's girlfriend. So our man decided to pay dude a visit; I supposed he had just made good on his earlier maxim. Back in the truck it was a while before he spoke. He knew I suspected something was up, as I kept looking over, yet he just kept his gaze straight ahead. I couldn't stand it any longer.

“So ... did you beat him to death and dare him to do it again?”

He took a deep breath.

“Put it this way: I don't think he'll be coming back to the post office for a while.”

A smile appeared on his lips, for a job considered well done.

“Post Office! DUDE. I thought you said she was a stripper?”

“Dat dat dat, ber-dat dat dat-daaat—Wooh!”

We burst into our favorite song with the ferocity that he'd displayed moments earlier, and were still vocally-air-guitaring as we pulled into the yard at the end of the day.

We got a lot of mileage out of that incident. While Flamenco Boy added a few inches to Stationery Guy's collar size, I was informed of the corresponding audio, “I didn't realize she had a boyfriend.” In time, I found myself acting out the stunned employee scenario and was able to work in Flamenco's other classic: *Get out and face it like a man*. I tried them in a number of styles but inevitably returned to the original delivery. They were received with smirks and snickers, and the ritual became a term of endearment, even greeting between us. Strange, the things that bond us to

others.

I have to say, I was ambivalent regarding his violent behavior. All three incidents were unacceptable conduct; this time however, there was a certain rough justice to it. He may have gone too far, but was reacting to an injustice that was first dealt to him. I had a fleeting admiration for a man who'd take matters into his own hands in order to protect his own, and not hide behind the skirts of another. There's something exhilarating about being with someone who appears not to conform to the same social constraints as the rest of us. It's like hanging out with a Super Hero, though Flamenco Boy was more of a dark avenging vigilante. Nothing is out of bounds. You can do anything you like. Ultimately, its frightening. Unless the person has a just code of ethics, a clearly defined grasp of right and wrong, any act is justifiable. In light of these events, I'm not sure he did. It was possibly only a matter of time before something seriously fucked up would happen.

I knew him through at least three girlfriends—androgynous types with short hair and common sense personalities. He was their beautiful idol whom they worshipped. After three months or so, when the best behavior act was dropped, they realized a sleek predator had been invited in to stay ... and it was too late. They were smitten and he would not move on till he was ready, and when he did, the place and the relationship was in a shambles. He would have unwarranted fits of rage and destroy doors, walls, and furniture. He was a parasite with a poor credit profile. His Chick MO was to move in on a woman that was already set up: place to live; nice car; good/secure job; all accounts and bills up to date, and in her name.

A Relationship in Decline

Our relationship began to sour when he accused me of sleeping with one of his girlfriends. Utterly paranoid and silly really, as his manly choice in a mate could not have been further from my own. Plus, he was a friend. He had actively encouraged the friendship between the girl and I— independent of him being around—and this was his reaction! He seemed to be setting us up for some reason. I convinced him his conjecture was unfounded, but it began to dawn on me that his volatile temper could easily turn on ol' Artie Boy. I may have been lucky, due to the fact that I simply hadn't got in the way ... *until now, perhaps?*

I was further implicated in his turmoil.

Mimicking my accent to a prospective one night stand had the poor girl believing he came from Britain. He'd made his move in my presence; it so came out of nowhere, without warning, that I almost laughed in his face. But he was serious. His attempt sounded ridiculous, a la Dick Van Dyke in *Mary Poppins*—“Awwlwoight, Moi Laidy”—a sort of halting 18th Century London chimney sweep dialect. *Please!* However, the flavor was there and unless you were a “somewhat anglophile,” you *may* not have known. Hard to believe I know, but she didn't. In order not to embarrass him publicly, I went along with it. His motive in the deception ... to appear cultured, debonair? A British rocker, perhaps? Who knows? It was bizarre. I mean, it was not as if he had trouble bedding chicks on the strength of his looks and charm ... what kind of game was he playing? He called it “just a bit of fun.” But it wasn't. Their liaison was ongoing, and the *fun* became a *lie*. I purposefully stayed out of the way, but got caught by shrapnel; she and I shared a table at one of his gigs.

“When the two of you were in that band together in England—”

“What?”

“That band ... in England? The two of you.”

Jesus, I gotta get outta this. I was a polite enabler allowing his poor behavior to continue; I had become part of the lie. Confronting him on this and issues of trust regularly, was “our dance” over the years, to which I would get no specific, honest, or even any response. With a bottle of wine under his belt, there’d be overt displays of caring and brotherly solidarity, and by the next day I’d find Mr. Pale Face “present but absent” again. A complete 180 that left me feeling woozy. It was all getting far too weird. All I can say is, at some point we draw the line—and I’d had enough. I was weary of policing his behavior and playing Substitute Daddy. I began distancing myself from him and his antics. I changed moving companies and was frequently “out” to his phone calls. We started to drift. ...

A Conversation with Mr. Rage (or is that Silence?)

I met his songwriting partner a few months after my decision to split and was surprised to learn they had gone their separate ways, too. I had seen him many times, but always in the presence of Flamenco Boy; here was an opportunity to get another side of the story.

“First of all, I gotta know, dude. Who was Rage ... and who was Silence?”

“C’mon man, you know what he was like. He *was* the name, Rage And Silence. He was rageful and then silent—absent/AWOL, missing in action. I’d leave four or five messages on his answering machine about a gig ... no response, nothing, like he’d fallen off the face of the planet. At the last moment he’d materialize without any explanation—all sullen and withdrawn—and I was like, *who is this person?*”

“Yeah, I know exactly what you mean. *Mr. Pale Face.*”

“Right. There was a time though, we were brothers—Brothers in Arms. I felt like it was me and him and the music against the world, and he had my back. Believe me, there’s no-one else who’d defend you more ... unfortunately, he was a deceitful person. He did not outright lie—he’d just leave out crucial pieces of information—and because it was not 100%, it *felt* like a lie. He was very clever at drawing you in, and once you’re in,” *CLACK!* he snapped his fingers, “*very* difficult to get out.”

He was describing a carbon copy of my relationship with RnS. Amazing. It was like an al-anon meeting; co-dependents both of us, swapping victim notes. Like I said, *polite enablers allowing poor behavior to continue.*

“I don’t like giving up easily, but it was too difficult. A very strange partnership. Magical when it worked, but that was because of the music. (We communicated perfectly through the music.) It was in our personal lives we had the problem. It was way up and then way too down, and there just wasn’t enough ‘up’ left. A man simply cannot live on ‘not enough up,’ Dude.”

“Shame tho’. I loved your songs.”

“Yeah well, what’re you gonna do?”

His last remark caused me to look again at the man in front of me—so very different from the impish performer, singing his heart out on stage. I smiled vaguely at the image.

“We split up and got back together a couple of times. The last time we tried to repair the damage, he was toasted and lecturing our new addition. A percussion player. Slurring words and trying to

check himself ... I had a moment of clarity. I must have been blind all that time, but I was hanging on to my dream: I didn't want the music to end. It took one simple incident for the light to go on and I realized he'd never ever change. (Unless he himself wanted to ... and that wasn't gonna happen.) It was the final straw. This was it. Over. For all the momentum we had as an act, I didn't have the energy for myself and his destructive ways any more ... I ... just ran out of steam."

Ultimately, he was relieved it was all over and was upbeat about future projects. We wished each other well and said good-bye. I watched him walk away and felt sad—*I just ran out of steam*. Hmm. It's so difficult to build something bright, full of a wonderful energy; it is even more so, to leave when it has turned into an ugly can of worms. It takes a certain kind of strength to acknowledge that change. Most of us hang on till the death, because it's the easier/familiar thing to do, and since our courage has deserted us.

Last I heard, Flamenco Boy married a woman who fairly much fitted the required physical, emotional, and financial stereotype. She went to work; he stayed home, and cooked, cleaned, drank red wine, and played the guitar.

Analysis: He came from hard working blue collar parents in a tough mid-western city. His puritanical mother clearly played a part in the way he reacted to controlling women, later in life. No doubt her fervent guilt regarding sexual matters had an effect, too. He told me of a memory he had of her: On her knees praying over him, that he should be granted strength to resist temptation of the forbidden and dirty deed, until marriage—*Hey-Zeus!*

When he came to LA, instead of returning to his old gig of giving guitar lessons, he got into selling naked pictures of himself to skin magazines. *What else?* There were veiled references to porno movies, in which his inferred participation was accompanied by a nod and a wink. He occasionally expressed an attraction for a transsexual in a film or magazine, and sported a dress code that revealed the bulge of his manliness (and I don't mean his wallet) ... the male camel toe, all too frequently. His predilection for a shorn, boyish look in a woman was the antithesis to his visual of a smooth-jowled visage and flowing locks; hair, by the way, that was luxuriant and beautifully maintained, oft admired by women. At times, he would pull it back with a horseshoe headband in that peculiarly feminine manner. He was content with the role reversal of playing house husband to a woman with a career. He loved to cook and entertain and had a meticulous passion for cleaning. An interest that few heterosexual men (I've ever met) have for furnishings, fabric, and design was a bit of a red flag ... sexually repressed or extremely liberated? You decide, Dear Reader—I'm not saying a word!

Mr. Pale Face, when present, reminded me of a wounded animal; one that is in a lot of pain and will lash out, but is fiercely protective when it's own are threatened. He needed a lot of attention and support ... physically abused/emotionally neglected as a child? He joined gang life early on and was involved in extreme exchanges with rival factions. After a while he grew bored of these rituals, and aspired to a more evolved existence. He developed an appreciation for good food and wine; and read up on history, politics, art, and of course, music. He studied different styles: Eastern, Classical, Contemporary (Bluegrass, Jazz, Blues, RocknRoll, etc.) and blended them all with his manic and fragile personality. His ticket out of the whole mess—looks and a talent for the acoustic guitar.

The final reason to leave came when his best friend died in his arms from a knife wound during a gang confrontation. He left for the romantic future that Hollywood could offer; the world would be

his oyster ... he arrived in this city in the great rock n roll tradition—at the bus station, pretty much penniless, except for his beloved six string. He disowned everything and everybody (including family—Mom, Dad and brothers) that linked him to his past. This was the New World. Here, he could be anything he wanted and took full advantage.

Towards the end of our friendship, my parents came to visit. We received an invitation to dine with him and his girlfriend. I was unsure whether to accept; I did not want to subject my folks to any of his nonsense. However, he insisted on meeting them. I sensed he would have been mortified had I declined. So I girded my loins and prepared my Dad to be on guard ... instead our man was the perfect host! A terrific meal (cooked by his own hand) with carefully picked wines, candle lit atmosphere, and music by Sinatra. He was accommodating, regarding the (in)famous British palate. (“Easy on the garlic, son”—a “warning” from Pa Q.) Flamenco was deferential to the unassuming couple who’d served their country in World War II, full of questions and thoughtful response regarding this turbulent period in history. The dinner was a high point of their visit here; everyone had a great time. My feelings about the evening were mixed. I was touched by the warmth he showed my folks, but as I joined in the spirit of the occasion I felt like a phony, knowing the whole cynical story. I regretted having expressed such reservations to my Dad (I felt like an ingrate), though was undeniably justified in doing so. Such a spread. You could say he played the dutiful son, and yet ...

I remember the manager at work informing me of three letters he’d received from Flamenco’s Mother, all addressed to her boy c/o the company. RnS refused to accept them. A fourth was sent to the office direct, pleading for information as to the whereabouts of her son who'd been silent for many years. She was heartbroken. How she knew his work location, I don’t know, but it was the last known address she had.

Definitely the soul of a Type B with some C characteristics.

CHAPTER 4

Relentless Mumbling

RM Dude

At first, it was a toss up where to put this mover. He didn't quite perspire by the bucket load (certainly he ran a close second to Moist Towelette Man), but what tipped him into this chapter was painting his image in my mind: Ventriloquist lips barely flapping/yet endlessly blathering, eyes misting over in a self absorbed fog. Yep, this was his "métier." It pipped all other excesses at the post. I closed my eyes and there he was ... Relentless Mumbling Dude.

OK. If someone said something, and your response was "Pardon me ...?" They'd repeat themselves. If you still didn't catch on, you may think your hearing was getting worse, blame it on the advancing years, and squinting-ly ask for *one more time*? Now, if this happened again and again and again, not just with you, but everyone the speaker came in contact with—don't you think the smart thing to do would be to raise the volume? Pump up the diction? I would think that's the way to go, and if it was me who was mumbling, everytime someone went through this "excuse me" procedure, I'd take a breath and exhale: *Speak louder. Enunciate clearer.*

Well, I can tell you that nothing prevailed with this mover. What compounded the situation was a vivid imagination that came complete with verbal translation—streaming—which included detailed commentary on trivia, as well as the good stuff.

When the level of speech is low, if you look at a person's mouth you can connect a little better, unless the speaker's words are not clearly framed on the lips. The respectful listener is then compelled to focus closely ... and most people are respectful listeners. So when complete attention was given to our man at every streaming exchange, it became exhausting.

It was a continuous verbal assault: No sphincter muscle to rein in the crap, here; no quality control button to push; not even a free "get out of mumbling jail" card to play; nor "escape this rambling monologue now" option to click. Even before realization of the concept, it was a microbe of a developing idea—*BOSH!* Right through the front door, straight out of his gate at a full gallop. A brisk clip. The brain and mouth were One; a water slide connected the two and sent the infant thought bursting forth into a harsh reality to be judged without the proper set of tools.

In a nutshell: This man appeared to have absolutely no say in what came out of his mouth.

A Paid Vacation

My dealings with him were superficial until our company went out of town on a job. I shared a room with RM Dude and it was then that I began to get an idea just how pervasive the turbulence was that caused the mumbling symptom. And this was just the tip of the iceberg.

A two, possibly three workday (unload/unpack)—Palm Desert in the spring time, where nights are

balmy and the days not overly toasty. An easy gig, for agreeable customers, in a luxurious location.

On out of town gigs, the standard fare for movers is truck stop/Motel 6 type accommodation (and that is if you're lucky), but this was a "village" of chalet type buildings favored by Old Hollywood as a getaway in the '40's. Quite a spread. It was unusual that we should get to stay there, however, this was one of the better moving companies and the benefits accorded to its workers were a notch above others. It was out of season, prices were down, and the location was so close, the movers could literally walk to work. So it all made sense ... still, it was light years away from my early start in moving where the overnight accommodation was *in the back of the truck* along with the furniture. Any "per diem meal allowance" was completely unheard of—*Ah, the good old days!*

I found myself looking forward to a working break from a rainy spell in LA.

At the end of day one, the boys (a crew of six) were left to their own devices, a decent group of guys. It was pleasant to share a beer and meal table with them, except for RM Dude, who'd disappeared early to our room to watch TV. The usual moving chat ensued regarding events of the day: a scratch the customer didn't recognize on an end table; a stain on a rug; missing key to a bedroom armoire (coincidentally, care of one absentee mover and his adequate moving skills, watching *Friends* round about now).

"Christ, he didn't leave it at the load, did he?"

A couple of dishes found chipped in the kitchen—bullshit stuff ... a few more beers arrived and Man's true nature surfaced.

"Would you do her?"

"What?"

"The customers' neighbor."

"WHAT! She must be 60."

"I'd still do 'er though."

One of the guys choked on his beer and sprayed the table.

"Aw Maaan."

"Hold your horses ... Mumbles said he'd do her."

It was true. He had a penchant for the older broads and would often surprise the crew with his taste in women. Then again, he was an old broad, too. The boys knew the score about RM Dude; they had him pegged and were getting a laugh at my expense. Here was their chance to rub it in.

"Dude, how you getting on with the mumbling man?"

"Got your ear plugs, Artie? You're gonna need 'em."

"Just don't lend him any money ... you'll be fine."

We had drawn straws to see who would get to share a room with him. I, of course, lost. I was apprehensive; don't do well with needy people—something about feeling smothered. That's my pain ... oh well, we all have a cross to bear.

"And don't get him talking, you'll never get away."

Yeah, right.

By the time I returned to our room (around 10 p.m.) the image of hemp haze and empty beer cans was as foreboding as the hunched figure, somewhat conscious, muttering at a 1950's black and white cowboy movie.

Oh-Oh, he's talking to the TV.

A newspaper headline flashed through my mind:

Mover cut down in bloody machete brawl. "TV told me to do it. The voices speak to me ..."

Hmm. I had two choices: Ignore him—go to bed and wake up dead—or spend the night by the pool. Grab a blanket and head for the nearest lawn chair.

Now, let me see. Death or moonlit snooze? Doo, der doot-doot, doo doo. Candlelight: care of the stars; or frantic stabbing? Erh, erh, erh, erhm.

It was glorious out there below the heavens, and the experience was definitely enhanced by the novelty of my plight. I felt more secure out in the open, a security patrolled environment, than in my own room. I am not a religious soul but there is something humbling about sleeping under glistening stars in an ink-black sky, an image not present when one lives in the city. It provoked, dare I say ... a spiritual perspective. It made even the "world's least spiritual human being" search for answers to life's great questions.

- Who or what brought all this into being ... and how?
- Consciousness and whether it expires when the human form dies.
- How fragile is man when compared to the enormity of the elements.

I was in awe of this vast moment. I was on a magic carpet ride beneath a jeweled canopy, but reality was tugging at my coat tails; black fade to gray as daylight, seeping in, little by little, began to spoil the picture ...

I returned to our room around 6 a.m. and found him bright and breezy. Clean Shaved Dude was eating breakfast and listening to news radio and made no mention of my absence. I had expected some exchange, and the fact it was business as usual and not a hungover weed head threw me. I had one more night to go with RM Dude and decided to try and head things (the weed at least) off at the pass. My conjecture: The combination of drink and pot had worked him into the previous evening's stupor; if I could cut one of them out or at least delay the pot smoking till much later in the evening, "Mr. Potato Head" might not pay a return visit ... *worth a try, right?* During the day, before he had a chance to sneak home and head for oblivion, I put my plan into action.

"Dude, joining us tonight for the last supper? Seven o'clock, sharp. Don't be late ... company's picking up the tab."

Of course, that sold it. The chance of *anything free* was too good to pass up.

Tough Times

When he started working for the company, he'd come off a long period of unemployment. (Smoking, drinking, partying, dabbling in petty crime, and generally being out of control ... some of which they were aware.) At first, he was full of resolve to get back on track: pay off debts, get an apartment, even ease up on booze and weed; but recently, he'd been slipping. As his no-shows and tardiness became a fixture, his work rate dropped by a dollar an hour—the office's way of trying to bring him to heel. Having been let down a number of times, fining him was their last resort. I'm not sure it was legal, but they did it anyway. He began borrowing against future earnings, so that by the time his wages were due, a big chunk was spoken for. The Mumbling Man was hurting for cash.

Frequently, two piles (donation and trash) accumulate outside the homes of people in the process of moving. RM Dude showed another side of his compulsive nature as a hoarder of free stuff on

jobs. Voraciously sought and procured insidiously by brow-beating a hesitant customer (wanting the tax write off) into gratuitous submission, he drew others into his mess. He was living off a woman, had no transport, and was a whisker away from being out on the street. Guess who was enlisted to bring all his crap home?

“What’re you gonna do about this bookcase?”

“Hmm, hadn’t really thought ... put it on the truck?”

“Yeahhhhh, but the truck goes back to the yard. How you gonna get it back to your place?”

No sooner did the fateful words leave my unthinking lips, that I realized my mistake.

“Erh ... you live close ... maybe you ...?”

“What? I can barely hear you.” Regrettably, I’d sealed my fate—I’d opened my mouth.

In time, RM Dude’s girlfriend complained about the “gifts” he brought home, and the office about stuff left-then-forgotten on the trucks. Eventually, they threw it all away. Bags and bags of shit that no one in their right mind would want. Then again, who said he was in a *right mind*. Everybody got sucked in.

Though it was never proven, it was believed by some that when the occasion was right and the stars aligned, RM Dude was not above a little light fingered pilfering. When people are squeezed, there are those who feel justified taking alternative means in redressing the economic imbalance (even though they themselves may be the cause of their predicament). So who knows what he was doing on the QT? All the signs were present of a slow decline. RM Dude must have felt like the world was closing in again.

A Night On The Town

At the appointed hour, RM Dude and I strolled to our dinner date. It was a glowing sunset and there was a “war is over” feel in the air. President Clinton was sending US peacekeepers to Bosnia; under pressure from the US, Balkan leaders had agreed to end three and a half years of fighting ... *Without us, the hard-won peace would be lost*, he said.

RMD (who’d served in Vietnam) became Clear and Articulate Dude and surprised me with informed opinions about the armed forces. He was proud of “his” military and energized by the fact that the US had played a part in a peaceful resolution. It was a stimulating exchange. I did not have to go through the usual *excuse me* procedure. Wow—Conversation not Dissertation! I was warming to him. This was a different man, with a confident voice and pep in his stride. Entertaining Dude now took the stage and was killing with the repartee. There was a lull ... it felt like the right moment (we seemed to have a rapport going on). I decided to take the plunge.

“You know man, I like you. I do. You’re an interesting guy—funny, articulate ... but sometimes, at work, I just can’t hear what you’re saying. You mumble. A lot, in fact ... you do realize?”

He seemed confused. I continued.

“I’ve started to ignore you because it takes such an effort to understand every exchange. I know you’ve noticed.”

Oh-oh. Too late to take it back now.

“Yeah, that’s what my Stepdad used to say. ‘Speak up son, prove you’re a man. You’re whispering like a *sissy* again.’”

“Woh, dude. I’m not saying anything like that (don’t get me wrong). I’m just trying to get you to

“speak more clea—”

“I wanted to paint ... *he* wanted me to play football. Wish my real Dad had come for me ... but he never came back. I never saw him again. Stepdad was in the army. He wanted me to join up ... Vietnam. *I* wanted to be an interpreter; *he* wouldn't have it. 'You be a mechanic son. Learn to talk and act like a Man.' I could have been earning my living as an artist. I'd a shown him ... shown *them* ... coulda made me some money, some *real* money. *Coulda Been Somebody* ... *too late now* ...”

“Look du—”

“*IT Should have been ME you guys are moving!*”

All was now quiet. Time was interrupted for a moment as if honoring a man's journey through life ... for better or worse. The silence was broken by heavy breathing and scrunching of shoes on the gravel pathway. WOH—Where did that come from ...? *A painful childhood, that's where.* I was passive before a tidal wave of anger, reaching down through the decades. I didn't know how to react or where to look. All I could think of was that army dude, *The Great Santini*, strong-arming his kids, belittling them on the basketball court. Marlon Brando was in there, too with his “coulda been a contender” line. I was awash in Hollywood imagery.

He was beginning to mumble again. The flow of good energy had dissipated and the conversation trailed off ... I felt bad. I had broadsided the atmosphere with a 53' tractor-trailer. I thought my words might help. *Some F'in Help.* Dark and Brooding-TV Talkin' Dude was back and it was my fault. With my plan to save the world gone awry, apprehension about spending a second night with him was beginning to grow.

The Last Supper

An outside patio table in the smoking section was reserved for the boys and we were served nouveau tex mex cuisine: *Tasty morsels for the sophisticated palate.* The sign had me wondering whether the meat and potato crowd of movers could handle the menu.

“Dude, where's the Menudo and Carne Asada?”

“Won't you try the naked shrimp marinated in lime and garlic, wrapped in a soft shell flour taco?”

“I want meat and beer. Don't want no faggy food.”

“Can't take you anywhere.”

“F You.”

The food was great, by the way, *everyone* loved it. The meal was a boisterous affair attended by hard working, hard drinking men celebrating the end of a job.

When it comes to alcohol, I'm a lightweight. I was on my second margarita and feeling like my image of heavy-lidded TV Talkin' Dude from the night before—what a wuss! I was surprised that RMD was neither drinking nor smoking ... *what's up with that?* Though I felt responsible for setting him off, I was determined his “all about me” MO would not impair my enjoyment of the evening ... again, I ignored him.

Because we'd not been tipped, the boys were getting a lot of mileage at the expense of the two guys we'd just moved. Six movers boozing—well, five actually. I'm sure you can just imagine the macho tone of conversation regarding the gay couple who had shown their appreciation with no gratuity. As we closed the truck doors that day, some of the boys had linked arms and kicked out

their legs in the Folie Bergere style, singing the Strauss waltz melody: *Der, der, der, der, derrr ... Cheap, Cheap! Cheap, Cheap!* Apparently, it had prompted “a little something” from customers in the past ... no such luck this time.

One guy revealed that it was his policy never to shake the hand of a customer who did not tip.

“You’re joking?”

“Uh-uh, an’ if I have one brewing—a bomb in the bay, know what I’m saying—I leave ‘em a little present ... in the bathroom.”

“*Wait a minute*, how do you have time to—”

“Oh. OH! *That* reminds me ...”

Another launched into his “I had a buddy of mine” story, in a Noo Yoork drawl.

“So Frank moves this uppity chick into a new home outside San Fran. He asks the lady if he can use the bathroom. (‘Big Mistake. Never ask to use a bathroom, just use it.’) Anyway, she tells him she doesn’t want him soiling a brand new toilet and that he would have to drive to the local town. Frank is beside himself and decides to teach her a lesson. He’s on the truck, he opens up one of the linen boxes—I swear to God—removes some of the towels and takes a *steaming dump*, wipes, then replaces the towels on top and reseals the box to look unopened. He instructs a helper to put it on the bottom of a stack of boxes in the guest bedroom closet ... *I kid you not, on the life of my children!*”

Another round. I’d had enough, but the boys just kept going.

“Oh yeah, Artie. Artie! *Someone* got lucky tonight.”

“What’re you talking about?”

“The customer’s neighbor ... remember?”

“*No!*”

“I got her number. I’m going back after the meal.”

“OH MAN.”

And so on. Much hilarity. All the while Dark and Brooding Dude was with us, but the alcohol and hi jinks had made me oblivious to his ramblings throughout the meal—all fired up and busting to vent. I was beginning to sober up and realized that my theory of drink and weed had zero cause for his mumbling. His comatose condition of last night—Yes. Mumbling—No.

Meal over and we drifted away to our rooms. I had a pain in my head from the alcohol and too much caffeine. Our walk in silence was a welcome relief but I could almost feel RM Dude’s mind-chatter bursting to get out. Once inside, the TV went on and the barely-flapping-lip MO began.

Hey-Zeus, don’t you ever shut up. Wait a minute, maybe it’s the television?

I saw he needed attention like a woman. Though he was neither drunk nor stoned, he was so needy that he chattered like a young girl. The flood gates were open and Self-Involved Dude was in the house, maneuvering the situation from a victim’s position. I caught snatches through a squinting headache: *World owes me, big time/Father stopped me from being a successful painter/Should have been me you guys are moving/He ought to have reminded me that I forgot to repay him the money I owed/Took my stuff, now they want my wages*—all about me, me, me! All of this manifests itself in mumbling BECAUSE YOU HAVE TO PAY ATTENTION TO ME.

In order to block the drone and live a pain-free life, I zoned out and fell back on the bed. After the throbbing in my head cleared a little, I sat up, massaging my temples. There was a lull in the streaming. Glancing up at the silence, I found him staring at me. There was an expectant *Well ...?*

about the way his head was cocked to the side, eyebrows arched. Palms up and outstretched. I noticed a line of perspiration about to drip and stared confused at the tie-die thing going on with his shirt ... his blue company T shirt.

Where have I seen ...?

I felt nostrils flare and my forehead grow wide.

Oh-oh. Moist Towelette Man speaks from the grave.

As I said, RM Dude could give MTM a run for his money. Another symptom of his pain. A profusion of chest hair peeped out of the neck of his shirt and had that growth condition that begged the question: *At what point should I stop with my neck because I'm now shaving my chest?*

I felt sad for him. Everything seemed like a struggle. Once again, the “I’m waiting” gesture demanded a reaction.

“... I’m going outside, dude ... to sleep with the stars.”

Monologue Man/Boxman

Another excessive mumble mouth, Monologue Man, was an “expert” on everything under the sun. His RM technique was not a question of low volume, but one of babbling—a real motormouth. His monologues (you’d hardly call them conversations) were not confined to his coworkers; he thought nothing of lecturing a million dollar homeowner while he himself lived in a rented trailer. This man had no shame, no tact, no brains ... but plenty of opinions—all unfounded, all indiscreet. Unless he was kept on a short leash by the crew boss, he’d end up grilling the unfortunate customer on any number of personal details.

When he lectured, he stopped working, which is usually the case when people have no focus. The talent to work and talk may sound simple enough, but it appears to be a concept that most cannot master. Movers are chatty folk and like to hear a good yarn and when they audibly stop working, the “\$80/hour/two men and a truck” cash register rings loud and in the customer’s ear.

“Work and talk dude, work and talk.” To no avail.

Monologue Man had an energy that could not be contained, percolating over in an endless parade of jokes and commentaries. Certainly not a comedian, he had a 1-in-50 witty pun success rate. Great ... the drag of course, was wading through the *49 un-funnys* to get to the one nugget of gold. Too bad. Like most people—funny, when they’re not trying to be.

Monologue was a less than competent mover who could not be trusted around expensive furniture, and his saving grace was his downfall: A reserve of staying power equal to that of the Energizer Bunny, surprising for a man in his mid fifties, useful only on stairs and with boxes; as long as there were plenty of ‘em and with nary a customer in sight ... Monologue was The Man—Boxman! Because of his indiscretion and lack of expertise he was used sparingly, on large moves or if we had no other choice.

“He’s a great sixth man *on a five man crew.*”

Bossman (Control/CH#7) thought this a funny line and would use it in relation to Anything Boxman. Buffoon Boy (also CH#7) was a good friend of The Monologue. They had Yacking in common; man, they lurved to talk up a storm. Two peas in a pod, a couple of Oblivious Pinheads, both.

Boxman and I had damaged some furniture we'd been carrying. Twice. OK, fair enough, every mover's entitled to a couple accidents—it's all part of the odds of moving—but we had sustained the damages because he was gabbing and not paying attention. It seemed my Work and Talk rule of thumb was not being applied appropriately. *How about Work OR Talk ...? Nah, then he'd spend all his time prattling ...* anyway, I had tried to rein in his storytelling politely, then out of frustration got angry, and finally in desperation gave him the silent treatment. It still didn't make a dent in the streaming. It was as if babbling was as essential to him as breathing is to others.

I hated getting damages; it cut me to the quick. I aspired to be a Great Mover and it stung my professional pride to think his sloppy performance reflected on me. And it did. A customer will only remember that *the movers* broke their favorite piece of furniture, *not* that one was a good mover and one not so good, and it was the one who was not so good who really was responsible ... *know what I mean?* It bothered me that he didn't seem to care ... and I liked working with people who cared. To me, a man is not defined so much by what he does, more *the way he does it*. I think *that* is the measure of a man. So my beef was with Boxman's "standards in excellence" (especially when the results embroiled those around him) and Buffoon Boy was always defending The Monologue. My point: Judge people by what they do, not just on words and thoughts.

"Yeah, but he means well."

"Oh, Great ... and exactly how does that translate into English ... and actuality?"

"*Wha—?*"

All Right ... "What do you mean, he means well?"

"He's got a good heart."

"Look, people who mean well don't cut no ice with me if the end result always equals They Fuck Up. And Boxman does, always fuck up. What difference, then, does it make what his intention is?"

"But he's got a good heart."

OK, this has gone about as far as we can take it. Thank You-Bye ... Mr. Buffoon. We'll see you later.

*

Because of his growing damage record, The Monologue was now relegated to "box and stair duty" only. If the carton and stair quota had been dispatched before the end of a job, he needed to be kept out of trouble. "Always revved and raring to go," sloppy performance, and an inability to listen (in a person who *means well!*) is a bad combination—a quadruple whammy, in fact. However, Bossman would be on hand to supervise accordingly ...

A sofa bed would not fit in a small playroom. It was decided to remove it to the guest house (in back, round a swimming pool via a rocky flagstone path). A harmless maneuver, no fragile pieces involved ... Bossman gave his blessing. The "lucky man" to partner up with Boxman was Jesús (CH #2/Maple Leaf Bob). While carrying the couch around the heart shaped pool, J Man (word-ily bludgeoned into a catatonic stupor—so distracted and disoriented at the endless verbiage and needy response it required) forgot what he was doing and where he was. As a result, lost his footing and fell in. Luckily, the couch did not follow. Bossman was on the scene and finished the maneuver with Boxman. He was fuming and squashed all The Monologue's streaming chatter for the rest of the day. A reprimand was good for at least 24 hours and by the next time we'd see him, it would be business as usual: same old, same old. He was demoted in Bossman's eyes though, who's

favorite line was amended.

“A great 26th man on a 25 man crew.”

He now, got even less work. We had to be in dire straits before Bossman would again use the services of Boxman—still living in that trailer with house bricks for wheels. *Babble-on, Monologue Man.*

Analysis: I have worked with other mumblers and the constant craving for attention and little lip movement are always high on the list. It is draining having to concentrate on every exchange; it insidiously draws the listener in. However, the endless blather coming at you deflects from being able to listen carefully, take in, and comment on the ridiculous or not, nature of a point of view. A gap in conversation usually allows a response, or at least a breather for thought.

So the continuous babble keeps the speaker from really being heard by the listener. Not only are our men not listened to as adults, were they not heard as children? In RM Dude’s case, definitely. To take it a step further, it may be that the unending verbals keep our men from feeling their own pain—their streaming keeps them distracted ... distracted from feeling like they have no point of view, that their opinion is worthless. And their lives without value. If so, Words, in this instance, equal Silence.

Everything is about he who mumbles ... so the only redress is to ignore them. Hey, ignorance is bliss. Who said that? Let me shake that man’s hand!

Though RMD was an educated man, his constant victim like state—always on the lookout for an easy way out—eventually pulled him into that petty criminal world of the C’s. For all I’ve said about The Monologue, he was not a dishonest guy of the C type, nor a B. Undoubtedly, he had the energy to be classed as hard working (A type), just in another profession, though. Hmm, he’s a strange one to categorize.

CHAPTER 5

Daddy, Daddy Look At Me !

An Office Move

It was an office move for a Travel Agency. The owner was in her early forties and my intuitive take was one of a wounded soul. *Victim*, somehow screamed at everyone of us. She was on her back in the middle of reception and made a big show about not being able to get up when the movers arrived that morning. She had her assistant walk the boys through the office layout. Her aide was a real babe and six horny guys followed the bouncing ball with tongues trailing. Luckily, everything was to go because none of us were paying attention to what was said. On the team were three Good Guys and three Whackos.

Oyster Man played for the Whackos. He was full of peculiar notions.

“She had sex last night; I can smell it on her.”

“What?”

“Aw yeah, yeah—I’m telling you, I can smell her.”

“All right Superman, calm down.”

He turned up each morning with two baggies: one filled with canned oysters, the other, lukewarm coffee. I had no idea why the caffeine was in a baggie and not a cup, though I’m sure there would have been some crackpot reasoning. On the off chance a microwave was to hand he’d give ‘em a blast ... and so Oyster Man was born.

To him, the edible bivalve represented virility, self sufficiency, and high nutritional value. He identified with the Sydney rock oyster that changes sex many times during it’s life. He saw this ability as being truly evolved.

“Aw yeah, just think, awh, at certain points in their lives they can have sex with themselves.”

“I don’t think it means that, dude. It’s not both sexes at the same time. It changes from male to female ... It’s not able to *do* itself; besides, it doesn’t have sex with another, it spawns—you know, releases sperm and later, eggs for fertilization.”

I knew as much, because after his initial declaration I did a little research.

“Nah, nah, there’s a changeover period ... and in that period—*Bingo!*”

“All right, if you say so. And that’s what you’re aiming for, is it ... sex with yourself?”

He was doing that anyway, in a sense. He’d not had a girlfriend or woman in twenty years since leaving the army and no doubt on that occasion she was purchased at the going rate.

Everything was about sexual prowess and the exotic supplements he’d try: Yohimbe Bark (stimulating blood flow to the genitals); Saw Palmetto Berries (the prostate herb); Deer Antler Extract, Tiger Penis Broth (promoting fertility/an aphrodisiac, among many other supposed uses). He boasted that eating dog food enhanced his staying power, the point of which eluded me as his celibate state made all the supplement taking seem redundant. *DOG FOOD—would that be raw or*

cooked, dude? He could smell whether a person had engaged in sex the night before ... surely a superhuman ability? At one time, he tried the diet that included ingesting a portion of his own urine. It seemed he'd try anything to promote the physical and sexual image of one bestowed with mystical/mythical powers.

Oyster Man lived in a motel, though no-one knew where. The only means of contact was to page him, and he'd return the call. He was a cowboy existing on the peripheries of the mainstream, venturing out and then scuttling back to a cocoon that kept the real world at bay.

Our guide continued the tour.

"Of course none of these cabinets go, they're all built-ins."

"If you want 'em to go, I'll do it. I can do it, if you want 'em?"—**One Arm Brian (1AB)**, Whacko#2. He was a big, dopey young man; the kind who'd be unaware that he'd just crushed your fingers with an earnest handshake. He would carry an overstuffed chair upside down with one hand, like a waiter holding a platter over his shoulder. Any two man pieces that could possibly be moved by one, he'd do it alone. 1AB regaled *all* with threats and challenges of strength, weight, and size: *How much do you weigh?/Wha d'you bench press?/Wanna work out with me?/I grapple. How 'bout it? C'mon—One Arm!* The One Arm declaration would be followed by the One Arm salute—a clenched fist punching the air, as if punctuating the words with an exclamation mark.

Assistant Babe (AB) seemed confused.

"Well, they're built-ins, attached to the wall. I don't think so."

"I can do it. Whatever you want, I'll take it apart—*one arm.*"

"That won't be necessary."

"OK, never mind him. Let's move along, shall we?" "**Mo**" (Good Guy#1)—in charge of the crew, and driver of one of the two trucks that day—rolled his eyes and steered her attention away from 1AB. "... anything else?"

A stocky Englishman, Mo came from the rough and ready school of moving, not given to frills but was quick witted and able to do a good job with whatever and whomever was available. He was a sensitive and literary soul who carried a lot of rage. Taking up the cudgel from a violent Father, he recreated past scenarios in the present—a harsh task master when it came to his own performance with furniture. If a piece wouldn't go into a room or damage was sustained under his care, old games were played out: *I'm not good enough, I never have been, nor will I be.* Regarding a chip on a bedroom dresser, I witnessed a furious cursing of himself and the "agenda of the piece." When he calmed down, I laughed at his inference that the dresser had a hand in the outcome.

"You know Mo. I think you're being a bit hard on yourself *and* giving the furniture way too much credit. It's not a living organism, after all."

"Ooooh, no. That's just what they want you to think. They have feelings, you know. They're doing it ... on purpose. They're, *pretending.*"

I looked from side to side and smiled.

"You're joking, right?" He started to laugh. I was relieved.

"Sounds a little paranoid, if you ask me," as we carried the dresser upstairs.

"Just because you're paranoid, doesn't mean they're not out to get you, Artie."

"*Hah, hah, hah!* Fair enough, Mo. Good point."

I liked Mo. He was a decent man. So he was a little paranoid. Aren't we all, to some degree?

"And finally our piece de resistance—the company safe."

There it was. Big and black with gold trim, and a combination dial next to an arm/handle-deal on the front. A sort of squat refrigerator shape with three or four industrial hinges that could support the weight of a nut busting door as it swung open. *WOW!* About eight hundred pounds plus ... a thousand even; we couldn't determine for sure. I'd not seen one this big or heavy before. I had no idea if it required a special dolly or expert moving services. Some kind of forklift, maybe ...?

"You say the guys just muscled it in on a four wheel dolly?" Mo asked AB, not to be confused with 1AB, of course.

"Yeah. Can you do it?"

"*Oh yeah ... we can do it.*"

"—Erh, erh, ah. I've moved these before. I know all about safes." **The Cheeseman**, Whacko#3. So named, after being dubbed "the dumbest man on the planet," as dense as a piece of cheese.

"Oh, really?"

"I, ah, made a moving video ... erh-training, and part of it was about mobile repositories."

"—I doubt that you'd be able to spell that last word, dude, never moind movin' it. Besides, I don't believe there's such a thing as a mobile repository. I think you mean a *suppository* ... and y'know where you can shove that." **Jimmy S**—Good Guy#2. A solid mover who split his time between teaching yoga and moving. An Irishman with a great sense of humor. He had a habit of removing his shoes and socks during the lunch hour to let his feet cool off or for some other strange reason ... they didn't smell, but it just seemed inconsiderate—whilst eating, that is. Still, he was a good man and with the Good Guys.

"No, no, I uh, know about these things, I'm an expert."

"Sure you're an expert. Last week, I heard you put diesel in a petrol truck." The Irishman continued his baiting of *the Cheese*.

"Ah, erhm, that was the helper ... I ah, was in the bathroom."

"And on the same move didn't you bury all the dollies at the front of the truck during the load *and* leave the ignition keys with them. You're an expert, all right. Hey, Artie—think this man's an expert?"

Artie Q—Mover#3 for the Good Guys. *Did you think I'd be playing for the Whackos!*

All foibles on my part will be well displayed in chapters to come.

The Cheese (driver of the second truck) could quite easily have snuck into the Relentless Mumbling Chapter, however there were just too many physical manifestations of his pain. Even one of his muttering monikers had a vigorous quality to it ... **Jabba Jaw**.

"*Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah ... huh?*"

He seemed to be somewhat a hybrid of both Relentless Mumlbers, infused with his own subtle twist: a sort of thinking out loud, figuring stuff as he went along, exercise. It was the kind that most of us do in our heads, as if talking ourselves through an involved procedure, like installing two hard drives in a computer—sorting out the pin configuration of master and slave, say. Or, diffusing a bomb:

If I snip the blue wire and join the red with the brown, civilization will be saved. On the other hand. ...

If ever you'd respond to his ramblings, he'd—

"Oh, no, no, no ... it's OK ... I was just, ah, talking to myself. 'S OK. OK."

In this case, his RM/MO was never conducted towards anyone in particular, though of course, it

was for an audience. Turning up late for work with a bandaged hand, or tape on fingers was a common sighting.

“Dude, what d’you do to your hand?”

“Oh, it’s nothing, I erh ... nothing, nothing. ... ”

On jobs where he was in charge as driver he became a frazzled mess, running here, there, and everywhere with little accomplishment to show for effort; unfocused and rarely present, the estimate usually spiraled out of his control. He drove the moving truck like a sports car and was involved in accidents due to impatient tailgating of the vehicle in front. His frantic energy seemed to be present at all times.

By the time we’d completed the tour of duty and come full circle to reception, “Wounded Soul” had managed to roll over onto her stomach, raise herself onto all fours, and then push up with her hands and onto her feet. Accomplishing this exaggerated display, she stood in front of her audience; that is, for those of us who could possibly have peeled our eyes off Assistant Babe. I didn’t doubt she had back pain, but there was something more at work here ... the attention factor that applied to the Whackos? A victim’s guilt-like manipulation for control over others? I’m not sure. Jimmy S suggested a few yoga and nutritional tips and was met with a barrage of reasons why her condition was exempt from such a pro-active approach. Every suggestion he made for any symptom she had was systematically shut down. Eventually, he turned away with a sigh, cheeks puffed way out. He caught my eye and winked.

“There’s no helpin’ some folk, Artie.”

“I hear ya, Jimmy boy.”

The Load

The plan was Oyster Man and myself prepping and moving furniture to the elevator. Jimmy and IAB taking all down to Mo and the Cheese (loading their respective trucks). Oyster Man worked one side of the office—“his rooms,” and I, mine; so that when we’d meet in the middle, we’d be done. We were on opposite sides of the world, which suited me just fine. Occasionally, we met at the elevator or in the event one of us needed help. The tension of a move in the early stages is alleviated when things start to roll—furniture disappears and tasks are seen to be completed, especially when movers are swift and capable. As offices are cleared of furniture their doors are closed, as if to give a progress report: It becomes clear what has been achieved and what is still to be done.

The initial hour of any move is crucial. A moving company should do their best work in that first 60 minutes, as this time period determines the customer’s perception of the whole moving experience. If it is favorable, everyone can relax; the movers can downshift into cruise mode and the customer feels like they are in good hands. If it is unfavorable, it’s a whole other ball game.

Because of my early image of Wounded Soul, I didn’t want to become involved in her fishing for sympathy MO, so I mostly dealt with AB. In the event of her absence I directed my questions to her boss, but confined them to a practical nature concerning the move. Pretty soon she dropped the victim stance and was straightforward and helpful. Though the two women had a professional relationship, they were warm and chatty with each other. Not only was AB a beautiful woman, she appeared level headed without a trace of LA chick attitude, and as much as there could have been

some jealousy on the part of Bosswoman, she didn't show it. I got the impression that she genuinely liked her "right hand man."

We broke through the initial hour and the pace eased up. More staff began arriving and the atmosphere became playful. The to and fro banter was infectious; I was carried along in the humorous melee. In time their confidence grew in their choice of moving company—our performance had been validated.

"Wow, you guys are FAST."

"We can slow down if you like?" I deadpanned.

"No, n, n, n, n, nooo. You're doing fine ... just fine. You shoulda seen the last guys."

I helped a lady with her desk.

"We were told we could leave stuff in the drawers ... *Please?*"

"Well, the problem is that these desks have to be moved on end and things like paperclips, pens, stamps—miscellaneous stationery—will fall out the back or side and get stuck or lost. Drawers get jammed. Glass and fragile stuff can get broken, too. Plus the fact that when you leave a desk full of files and paper it's a lot heavier for us to move ... it's best to put the contents in boxes."

"Hey Julia, stop giving the man a hard time. Help him out, empty your drawers. You never usually have a problem with your drawers in front of a man."

The whole office erupted. Wow, Wounded Soul in charge and cracking everyone up. Pretty funny, I must admit.

"I hate moving."

"Well Julia, look at it this way—you know what they say, don't you?"

"NO ... what *do* they say?"

"Hate the move. *Never* hate the movers."

More laughter. The cut and thrust of my warm spirited two cents pleasing the masses. People think that a move is made difficult because of heavy furniture, many stairs, awkward access, long carry to the truck, etc. Conditions. Well, all that comes into play of course, but far and away the worst jobs for me were because of the human element. There's nothing you could do to please certain people and they could turn an easy load into a nightmare. A move was made difficult because of difficult customers; when the customer had a sweet disposition—Life Was Sweet. I liked to work hard while having fun, and despite the warning signals at the start of the day, this was becoming my kind of move.

The owner switched gears. She wondered why I was not wearing a weight/support belt. I believed weight belts were a false sense of security. Movers who wore them inevitably paid no attention to the way they were lifting furniture, as if the belt bestowed magical powers to ward off back pain. In actuality, they reinforced poor posture and really only gave slight relief. Of all the guys who wore them at work, very few said it made a real difference. As far as I was concerned, "belt support" was merely treating a symptom, and not for me. Raw food, plenty of veggies, water, exercise, and a good vitamin regime—now *that* is the way to go—a pro-active approach to back pain. I'm not discounting the influence of life's emotional effects, family genes, accidents, surgery, inclement weather ... but, it is a good base to start from.

"You mentioned a vitamin supplement. Which one do you take?"

Erhhh. Shall I or Shan't I? If I tell her my situation, will I become immersed in her song and dance?

Maybe my original perception of her was wrong. Perhaps I'd been a little hasty. Intuition, I would say, is 90% right; she could have been part of the remaining ten. I decided to chance my arm.

"I broke my neck when I was young and had tension and aches periodically: neck and back stuff. Moving aggravated the situation. I tried weight belts, chiropractic re-alignment, massage ... I went regularly and it gave me some relief. A few years ago I started taking an organic herbal supplement, under protest, on a friend's recommendation and the tweaks and pains went away almost overnight. I have not visited the chiropractor or masseuse since. My problem was nutritional. Of course, this is only my experience and it may not work for others."

"Hmm."

She smiled, as if regarding a strange animal for the first time.

"Sorry, you did ask. I'll get off my soapbox, now."

"I'm curious ... what are you doing in LA?"

Right then Oyster Man needed assistance.

"Oops, gotta go. I've got a date with a marine invertebrate."

"*Wha—?*"

Actually, I was pleased to be interrupted at this point. I was a little wary of too much talk during a move, even if it was to answer personal questions from the customer; it made me antsy. Though I made a point of trying to work and talk (Boxman CH#4), it was not always possible. No matter how nice customers appeared to be, the "chatter detail" or "lack of work," could and had been used in evidence against a mover, if the bill was considered excessive (by the shipper). Anyway, all was going smoothly ... until Marine Invertebrate Man chose to confront his demons.

Pièce de Resistance

The difference between a household move and that of an office, is the type of furniture involved. In a domestic environment there are couches, upholstered chairs, box springs, mattresses, cartons, even carpeted stairs to glide up and down—soft squishy things. At the office, unless it's a banker's box, not only is it a mean-edged pointy thing, it's heavy as hell: Metal file cabinets—lateral four drawers, fire-proof file cabs (groin strainingly beefy because they're full of files and the walls are lined with lead); lawyers desks complete with return & credenza; bookcases made from the densest wood imaginable; and the company security stronghold, safes. Even rolling computer carts are big and unwieldy with rough splintery corners. Stuff in the home is seen as top priority (value wise), whereas items at work are "expendable." (Relatively speaking.) So there's a tendency for movers to relax their guard ... which is exactly what they should *not* be doing. The unforgiving nature of the furniture become "accidents waiting to happen." Plus, all the staff here, were women ... attractive women. So with the testosterone level through the roof, the weakest of movers will do anything to impress the ladies ...

"*Urgh. Urgh. Urgh.* I can do it, I can do it."

"Dude. Why not wait for the rest of the guys? I mean, we've got a six man crew, here. The boys will be up any moment; the deal was, six of us on the safe."

"Nah, nah. I'm not gonna let this thing beat me."

It was flush to the floor, no legs. Oyster Man was trying to get the blade of an appliance dolly underneath. Thing is, it was all he could do to get the tip in—an inch or so. That was enough for

The Mollusk. OK, now the problem was to gain leverage. The repository (if indeed the word *can* be applied to safes) needed to be braced on the floor—the opposite side, so that it would not slide with his action ... and I was not about to tackle this 800 pound puppy on my own with *Shellfish Boy* as partner in crime.

“Dude, there’ll be here any minute, why not wait. This is *way too heavy*.”

“*Urgh. Urgh.* This piece is not bigger than *meeee*—”

In trying to tip the monster with an inch of blade, caused the dolly to slip out and *Marine Boy* fell backwards skidding across the linoleum floor. He came running back.

“One more go. *Urgh!*”

He gave me the 1AB One Arm gesture, showing his mettle *and* informing me that he thought I was a pussy. At first, I had at least considered wanting to help but now it was all about *him* versus ... god knows? Once again, there was no headway to be made reasoning with a brain full of delusional mind-babble.

Ga ‘head. Knock yourself out, dude.

“*Urgh. Urgh. Uuuuuurrrrggghhh!*” This time he did not come running back.

“Y’alright?”

Though I didn’t really care, he’d hurt his shoulder and I felt a twinge of guilt that I’d not tried to help. Soon enough, the rest of the crew arrived. Mo saw Oyster Man holding his shoulder. He looked at me and gestured to him. I shrugged.

“You tried this on your own, didn’t you? You knew we were all coming up to tackle this together. What were you thinking? *It’s an eight hundred pound inanimate object!*”

He shook his head. “Hopeless, hopeless. ...” he intoned. There was a faraway look in his eyes. I wasn’t sure if he was reflecting on life in general, or the situation. I looked at Mo and smirked.

“What is? Life, or This?”

“Both, Artie ... both. We’re all doomed.”

I knew Mo was given to these melodramatic statements, so I scanned for a trace of irony.

Hmm. Chewing his fingernail. I wonder what that means?

Oyster Man was now no longer the proud invertebrate of yesteryear. He seemed to have shrunk, retreated into his shell. Physically hurt and publicly tamed. Silent as a clam and certainly not a happy one. That’s how you know someone’s completely whacked out—when they go from world domination to shrinking violet. Just Like That.

“OK, we’re gonna muscle this piece as a team.”

The two other Whackos burst in with suggestions.

“THIS, is what we’re gonna do. Two men, brace it on that side. Three are gonna tip it and allow one of us to slide the blade of the appliance dolly in. We’ll attach it securely and then brake the safe back over to us using the dolly. When it is balanced on an angle, You—*Oyster Man*, will put this rubber cap four wheeler* underneath *with your good arm*. When it is in the middle of the bottom of the safe, We will push it back onto the four. OK. Any questions?”

“Yeah. Now Oyster Man has hurt his shoulder, I’d like to wrassle him. *C’mon Duuuude*. One Arm. One arm behind my back!”

“Oyster Man ... I loike that name. That’s a good one, that is. Hey, how ‘bout this one—Suppository Man?”

“Erm, ah when we-ah moved the repository in the video, we used a special dolly. We should use a

special dolly”

“Well we don’t have it, do we? As I said: *Any questions, not any stupid comments.* OKAY. Let’s go. You two ... over there --->”

It was a beast and the dolly creaked and whined in protest as we pushed it to the elevator. Fortunately, there was no soft carpet for the wheels to sink in: all hard flat surfaces to the truck. The company had sent a vehicle with an electric lift gate precisely for this piece. Problem was, it rose at an angle and when fully elevated and flush to the floor of the truck, the slope down made our task a risky exercise. So we decided not to use the lift gate. Instead, we’d take the safe off the four wheeler and push it straight up the ramp using the two wheel appliance dolly, still attached. The two biggest guys would take the horns (handles), giving it some weight to keep the monster from breaking back over onto it’s feet. Pushing or pulling, *and* keeping it balanced was a tricky move, but then the Cheese was on hand ... and he was an expert. *Right?*

“All right, here’s the deal. Myself and the Cheese will take a horn each, Jimmy and Brian on the bottom, pushing. Artie and Oyster on each side of the ramp. Oyster Man—you can help push using your good arm. Brian, I’d like you to use both hands and Cheese, make sure you don’t hurt yourself, OK? Thank you. All right? Let’s do it. One, Two, Three. Go!”

It was a struggle, but no doubt the safest way.

“Piece o’ cake” said IAB.

“One Arm!” sneered Jimmy S.

We left it on the appliance and secured it with tie downs and logistics (wide adjustable straps with a metal clip fastener on both ends, that snap into a receptacle in the wall), and finished up the rest of the load.

Lunchtime

I arrived at the unload first. This was back in the day when I used to ride my motorcycle to work. It was a Honda Nighthawk 750. I loved that bike: all chrome and black with a white custom paint job. Nice and clean, easy to maintain. From above, the petrol tank looked like a teardrop. Beautiful lines. I pulled in next to the front door of a one story building, in a small parking lot.

Good, no messing with elevators.

I knew the boys would stop for lunch, so I had a 30 minute break ahead of me. Time to take it easy. Sit on the bike in the sunshine and snooze. With the machine on it’s center stand (an additional feature, by the way), if you mount, facing the wrong way and lean back on the tank, it’s like an uncomfortable armchair ... without the armrest. Backpack for a neck roll. Nice. I drifted away with a mouthful of sandwich in the warm and reflected on the events of the day ... This was not a moving company I regularly worked for, but my schedule was slow and here was an opportunity for a day’s pay. Apart from the Whackos—who actually weren’t unpleasant to work with—the Good Guys and staff of boisterous women were turning the day into a pleasant experience.

I could do ... a lot ... worse. Mmm, think I’ll lay here all ...

Thoughts grew distant as the sun lulled me closer to oblivion.

“Nice bike.”

Huh? Sun has a face ... talking to me.

“Nice bike.”

Oh. Her-hmm? Yeah?

I came-to and found the owner standing in front of me.

“Hi.”

Oh, I remember now.

“You dropped your sandwich. It’s OK though.”

“Thanks.”

She seemed changed, no longer the lethargic victim of first thing this morning. She was smiling, vibrant. She was wearing a figure hugging business suit. Attractive. Possibly a touch of make up. *Moving Day Make Over: Wounded Soul becomes Owner Babe.* This was more like the image of a boss of a thriving business, a go getter whose company was expanding its territories.

“I’m sorry I didn’t mean to disturb your rest, it’s just that we had an interesting discussion this morning and I wanted to talk some more.”

I wiped the excess sandwich from my mouth ... *Oh-Oh!*

“I wasn’t drooling, was I?”

“Well, a little ... I like it when a man drools.”

Wha—?

“I’m kidding ... kidding.” She gave me a look and started to laugh ... we waited in the sun, chit chatting about anything that came to mind. She was confident and funny, a world away from the walking wounded of this morning. Like night and day. It was a playful exchange. Suddenly, out of nowhere—

“So, do you take anyone for a ride on that thing?”

“This ...? Occasionally.”

“Fancy taking me for a ride?”

“Sure, if you’ve got a helmet. It’s the law.”

“I was hoping you’d have one of those ... you do have a helmet, don’t you? An extra one, that is?”

I smiled. I couldn’t believe where this was going.

“Here ... something you’ll need.”

She handed me a piece of paper. Just then, one of the trucks lurched into the lot, head first. The other would back in; that way we could unload both simultaneously. Of course, it was no surprise to find out who was driving the first one like a maniac.

Oh look, all the Whackos seem to be in one vehicle.

1AB confirmed their arrival by shaking a “one arm” out the window, no doubt throwing down his gauntlet to the world.

“Email me.”

“Oh yeah, right.”

And she disappeared

Woh. I’ve just been propositioned. High powered business lady wants a bit of rough.

The afternoon suddenly got a little brighter, even in the sunshine. It always does when a chick likes what she sees and lets you know. I found I started the unload with an extra vim in my vigor. It is, after all, one of life’s great experiences to have someone of your fancy holding on tight, on the back of a motorcycle.

The Unload

After the trucks had been set up, the boys viewed the new premises with Assistant Babe; the owner was busy dealing with phone companies, computer techs, electricians, etc.—trying to continue some semblance of a business throughout the course of the move.

“So. Where do you want the safe?”

“Yeah. Where do you want it, then? We can put it anywhere you want. Anywhere!”

By this time, AB had got a handle on 1AB.

“How ‘bout, *the roof?*”

“On the roof? You want it on the roof, I put it on the roof.”

“I don’t think she means—”

“One Arm!”

“Dude, she doesn’t want it on the roof. It was a *joke*. JESUS!”

“Put it in the mail room, Brian. In the corner. That’ll be just fine, thank you.”

“Hey, where’s the Oyster Man now that we need his suppository moving expertise?”

“He’s in the truck ... Spawning. *Hah, hah, hah!*”

“He’s-s-ah, in the cab, not feeling too good.”

“You know, *after spawning* the oyster regains prime condition over the following weeks.”

“Oh good” said Mo, “that means he’ll be ready to help us with the safe, then. We’ll leave it till later. The more the merrier.”

It was decided that the Whackos would unload their truck and the Good Guys theirs. Unloading one truck with six guys, or five at that point, can get a little crowded. As there were a quite a few tiers of bookcases, file cabinets, and desks, we had a warm up period before we tackled the monster. It was an easy unload, really. Straight in, no steps, except one at the front door and *that* we cut with a ramp. All pieces on wheels, no carry ... and the furniture fairly flew off the trucks. We’d be done in no time at all. The boys were in good spirits and had a fun time flirting with the women from the agency. These ladies were no wallflowers and enjoyed a bawdy sense of humor, the kind I imagined would be found in a girls’ locker room or at a bachelorette party. No airs or graces, here.

We all ganged up on the safe when it came time, and a revitalized Oyster Man made an appearance. He was feeling better, having taken an extra dose of cayenne pepper and yohimbe supplement. He’d contacted the office, meantime, and been given the green light for three visits to an acupuncturist of his choice. (He swore by this one guy in Chinatown.) He wasn’t 100%, but was back to his old skewed self and happy that workers comp had covered his alternative choice in medical coverage.

“The suppository was a piece o’ cake,” to quote 1AB, though there was a moment of anxiety when we hit a lump in the asphalt and the safe whipped back onto it’s feet. I remember looking over at the group of giggling women in the doorway, having a high ol’ time at our expense. I wondered what they must be thinking. Did they know that the crew was made up of Good Guys and Whackos? And I’m sure, in light of what they were witnessing—six grown men in heated debate over a large inert hunk of metal—it may not have been clear who was who.

Analysis: As I review so far, it’s clear that the whacky behavior was simply a cry for attention in any way, shape, or form. 1AB shouted his demands from the rooftops. His MO was very much

one dimensional and always with the physical challenge.

The Cheeseman's method was more complex. "Being the expert," mumbling, inflicting physical harm on himself, turning up late for work, being unruly and disruptive—all designed to suck victims into his mess. Rumor on the Cheese was that as a young man he'd shot himself in the foot and then bragged about it later. How's that for attention at any price ...? *Yeehah! It's all good*, as they say. It was no surprise to find out that he'd been in foster care as a child and was prescribed Ritalin for his ADD condition. From what I gathered, a pretty lonely existence. Life seemed to be in charge and it was all he could do to hang on. His adult behavior reminded me of a hyperactive kid. He smoked and was constantly alert. He'd eat his food like a child: The way they sing and chatter; bounce their knees; tap the plate and table with knife and fork, all during the meal ... and then rush to get up at the end with an abundance of energy.

Oyster Man had this big bold front, projecting those paranoid ideations of otherworldly skills loud and clear to give himself the image of being important and strong, informed and wise; but I'm sure it was not really how he felt. Certainly his marginal lifestyle—no credit profile, lack of permanent residence, absence of a woman for 20 plus years—was not a confidence booster. The safe incident: to prove against all odds that he was The Man ... and then his "little boy lost" reaction, was telling. Had he been successful with the "suppository," he would have been Employee of the Decade, feted with honor, not to mention—one for the annals of moving campfire stories. Maybe too, he just wanted to impress the agency chicks. For all his bluff and bluster there was no end result, no payoff. Though Oyster Man and the Cheese were competent movers, their spectacular blunders and deluded thought process made them, on occasion, dangerous to work with. 1AB was scarcely OK.

Mo was a stand up guy with literary aspirations. The fact that he battled depression on and off was undoubtedly (in part, at least) because of his Father. He displayed a severe reaction to people in authority when he felt they abused the privilege.

Jimmy, a fine satirical commentator had a problem with authority in general. He would never wear the company T shirt ... ever. I suppose it was a passive aggressive move and his no shoes or socks deal tied in with this underlying feeling. Certainly all the people he provoked/got into it with, were those who wielded a certain amount of control: drivers, crew bosses, etc. He was individual in everything he did and resisted pressure to conform, somewhat like the sixth mover (Mr. Q) in this chapter, but we'll find out a lot more about him soon.

Ah, the whacky behavior of the Good Guys! So then, what makes a Good Guy a Good Guy, and not a Whacko, after all they display their demons, too ...? The difference is that they wrestle with their demons and the Whackos are the sum total of them, oblivious to the raging inside. A Good Guy recognizes his irrational deed and attempts to deal with it—at times, not such a gulf between the two camps; yet, at the end of the day, it is vast.

As an aside, after a couple of dates with Bosswoman, my initial take on her was confirmed. The image of Owner Babe was fleeting and nowhere to be found on our motorcycle excursions. At this point I bailed, alarmed at the prospect of becoming further involved with too needy a soul. (A Wounded Soul.)

All the Whackos were C types and the Good Guys, B's. Though, at some point Mo started his own moving company and was successful, and so, introduced a little of the A type into the equation.

* Generally, most furniture is moved on a four wheel dolly that has a material covering, but upright pianos and heavy flat bottomed pieces require the instant bite/sure grip of the rubber cap-four wheeler. If terrain is a little rocky and the piece is a beast, you need a four wheel dolly that'll not slip or slide out.

CHAPTER 6

The Man Who Wasn't There

Bossman was the owner/operator of a small, quality moving company servicing high end homes. In my estimation, the best of it's kind in town. Though he'd bring in extra muscle when necessary, he had a core group of five guys who worked the moves: Himself, Research Man, Buffoon Boy, Artie Q, and The Man Who Wasn't There.

*

One of the strangest forms of behavior I witnessed, was from a man I can best describe as The Man Who Wasn't There. Not that any of his actions were singularly odd, but when viewed en masse, the picture disturbed the eye. A man so agreeable (on the surface, at least), so disinclined to provoke, offend, obstruct or declare passion or thought openly; that all of his arguments, when challenged, folded like a house of cards. His lack of commitment to any idea would irritate, though it was impossible to remain annoyed for long because of a sweet disposition: It would be like holding a grudge against an old family dog, so pleased to see you—it wet itself on the carpet. Upon agreeing with your point of view, he'd turn 180 degrees and concur with the opposition.

“Wait, didn't you ... a few moments ago ...?”

“Oh, I erh, know I said that I ... but it's just that, you're so much more informed than me, Artie.”

What ...?

He accompanied his bowing and scraping with a knowing smile, causing me to wonder whether I was I being played in some subtle fashion. Indeed, as he registered low on the impression scale, I had no sense of him for the first six months. Was there any substance to the man? Would I reach out and touch a ghostly presence? See my hand pass through the human condition and come out the other side ... the other side of a long trunk with bent stubby legs and disturbing Groucho Marx body-language. Unfortunately, no cigar or quick wit for you, my man.

Our common love of the Bean prompted many a discussion.

“Look, regardless of country of origin, language and pretentious accent—L'Express is a train in France, and espresso is a type of coffee bean and the basis for cappuccino. Too many people say *expresso*, when they mean *espresso*. As I understand it, the more the valued guest, the stronger the shot would be served in their honor. Before machines did it for you, you'd force or press the water through the grind of coffee.”

“Ooooooh, Oh-oh, Oh-oh—OH! You see Artie, you know these things.”

“Forget about that. Say after me: *ESS*.”

“ESS.”

“Ess-spresso”

“Ess-spresso”

“Right. Now you're as informed as I am.”

“Well, thank you very much Artie, but can an ex —pardon me, Ess-spresso. Can it still be espresso if it’s organic, or does it have to be regular?”

And off he’d obfuscate, back peddling his way onto an obsequious new horizon.

*

MWWT was born in Hollywood in the late ‘40’s, and spoon fed a diet of comic books and cowboy movies. A product of a B movie-starlet Mother and distant ranting Father (who had an inability to reign in the whacked out wife who’d spoil her first two children). Pa made sure they would not make the same mistake with their third child. So, going against centuries of child rearing tradition, he decided to keep his youngest on a much shorter leash.

Coming of (pop culture) age in the 60’s, MWWT exploded out of his restrictive confines; he drank, smoked, drugged, and caffeinated to the Nth degree. A collapsed lung (twice), EST, and 20 years of Scientology all played a part, too. He found himself at a crossroads, and deciding to pull himself out of his compulsive abyss, became a born again Christian. He has claimed that he would have died from his excessive lifestyle had it not been for the moderating influence of his faith.

Though I describe myself as “somewhat agnostic,” I’m rather envious of those who bask in the comfort of eternal salvation. I wish folks well who’ve come to religion based on sensible reasoning and study. I am suspicious however, of people like our man here, who’ve been out of control all their lives ... and then find religion. It feels like they’re swapping one opiate for another, or rather, using it as one to combat many others ... are they are cynically joining the flock with the dual purpose of masking the pain and keeping their options open, with a view to joining the Hundred Mile High Club at the end of their days ... I wonder?

Mr. Freebie

He would arrive on the job armed with an array of paraphernalia.

- A food cooler brimming with anything other than cool food: vitamin supplements; plastic bottles full of nutritional aid for respiratory and brain ailments; a container of Aloe Vera—his alternative to sun screen, applied liberally on unprotected skin (under *and over* clothing. Yes indeed, I saw with my own eyes!); finally, his favorite. Chips, pretzels, and bread. Always organic, of course.
- A backpack loaded with flyers, magazines, and paperbacks regarding such topics: The dangers of drinking water contained in low grade plastic water bottles; aliens from outer space; government conspiracies; the latest from the nutritional world, and more.
- A Grade 7 water bottle, usually full of reverse-osmosis (or some healthy equivalent) drinking water.
- A plastic bag from one of the up scale health conscious supermarkets with god knows what in it ... more UFO literature, I reckon.
- In the back pockets of his pants—a *veritable menagerie*—marker pens, box cutters, sundry moving items, a *Welcome to the Kingdom of God* leaflet in one, and *The Long Term Dangers of Mercury Fillings in Teeth* in the other (or some similar topic/title always on display).

MWWT gave lip service to some sensible ideas. He supported the value of raw, organic vegetarian food in front of myself and another health conscious moving bud—once claiming to eat a twelve ounce bag of broccoli florets as part of his evening meal, at least five times a week—but who knows what he really believed and how he behaved when not at work. His supposed love for the

green vegetable manifested itself in small amounts in a baggie, jammed in, but conveniently visible next to the back pocket literature, causing knowing smirks between myself and said moving bud (SMB) ... it appeared to be present specifically for our benefit. Yet, when the customer sprang for lunch, no matter how devoid of nutrition, how chemically fertilized the meat, how genetically altered the produce, the key factor in this equation is FREE. It was all, free. Let us be clear: There is thrifty and there is cheap, and our man was a fully paid up member of The Complete Cheapskate Cooperative. All his opinions about nutrients; vitamins; free radicals; toxicity of poor quality, heavily processed, and overly cooked food, lacking in enzymatic quality—ALL, OUT THE WINDOW when the customer bought lunch.

While he gorged his palate.

“Don’t mind me, Artie, I’m just pigging out. I’ll detoxify later and sweat it out with a hydrotherapy fast.”

Per-lease! Such a lie. Cheap to the extreme, he sold his soul to the highest bidder. Even the radicals were free. His “food move” was like that of a chick: issuing a disclaimer, while preparing to eat. A quick snack *to go* from a bag of chips that were not organic.

“I know what you’re thinking, Artie ... my wife bought the wrong kind.”

“*Hmm.* Does she not know that you prefer organic? I mean, you’ve been married twenty five years, right dude?”

“Yeah, well ... she doesn’t really believe in organic produce ... *‘just another scam to charge more.’* At least they’re not hydrogenated and there are trace elements of Co Q.”

“And that’s ... good ... right?”

His last remark went over my head—something to do with peanuts and their nutritional value. Things were not adding up here. We never found out if he followed his espoused, healthy lifestyle at home and suspected if at all, it was only partially true as economy was forever an issue. And *organic* is usually more expensive. Now, we learned that his wife was not of nature’s mindset, who just *forgot* to buy organic. Or was it a passive aggressive move ...? Or just being thrifty? *No way* she can not have known, as her quarter century husband was a creature of habit. There were definite mind games afoot, here. I could only imagine the shenanigans between those two.

An Unlikely Friendship

Even though MWWT was a skilled and sure-footed mover, he got so used to being told what to do, that over a period of time he lost the ability to act independently. It didn’t matter that he made the most basic of mistakes, because he was always being monitored and his error would be caught. So Mr. Freebie morphed into Lobotomy Man. On arrival at a job, he would walk around in a catatonic state waiting to be organized, terrified of committing himself openly to a task, being judged and possibly ridiculed. Like the Cheeseman, his muttering made him yet another contender for the Relentless Mumbling chapter, had he not been so bountiful in other departments.

“Erh, I-erh, erhm ... you have to forgive me today guys, I’m ah, a little slow. I had 2 pieces of chocolate last night and forgot to take my Ginkgo Biloba and Lobelia, today.” *

So wacky it all was you just had to smile, along with him, shake your head and walk away. Lobotomy Man could disarm the ridiculousness of any situation that he had created by a non sequitur that made himself the butt of the joke.

*

Lobotomy did not know many such as SMB, “an exotic creature from Europe.” Unlike himself, whose thoughts were sampled through a conspiracy fog, Said Moving Bud’s general view of life (politics, philosophies, mental and physical well being, etc.) was based on an informed approach. Lobotomy loved being in the presence of one who gave measured and wholly formed opinions, and SMB in turn, was endlessly amused at the antics of a man whose arguments seemed to be founded in *holding up a finger to see which way the wind blew*. Said Moving Bud and Lobotomy were worlds apart, but they became friends. (Well, lets say *friendly*, on SMB’s part anyway.) Soon however, Lobotomy Man became slavishly devoted to SMB. He longed for his company—invigorated, when Said Moving Bud was on the crew and slothful when he wasn’t. Wherever SMB was working, he’d somehow inveigle himself in the goings-on of that room. On jobs where the crew was large in number, Lobotomy figured he would not be missed too quickly by Bossman. Here was a window of opportunity for him and worth the reprimand, if caught. They were in Abbott & Costello mode and the basis of their comedy stylings was the other’s choice in a nutritional supplement ... their favorite subject:

My vitamins are bigger than yours/Yeah, but mine are better/Mine are absorbed quicker into the bloodstream because they’re a liquid/Why does a doctor dispense a tablet then, and not a liquid?/Because it’s a conspiracy on the part of the pharmaceutical industry ...

—Lobotomy, with his usual conspiracy take. The boys were in rare form. Bossman materialized in the doorway.

“What are you doing in here? You’re meant to be disconnecting the washer/dryer. You’ve been on it for the last hour. Is it done?”

“No. I erhm, needed a tool, erh ... thought he needed a hand. ...”

“He’s a big boy, he doesn’t need your help and if he does, he’ll ask. Besides, the laundry room is way on the other side of the house and the tools, *as you know*, are on the truck. What are you doing here ...? I think you love him. DO YOU LOVE HIM?—*Two lovers canoodling in the Master Bedroom*. Bring the washer/dryer to the truck!”

*

SMB was relaying this incident as strains of the Big Bopper, a 60’s Rock n Roller, became faintly audible in a voice, basso profundo. No, not quiet, it was subliminal. Lobotomy Man was “working the room.” SMB leaned in with a smile.

“He wants to be noticed.”

I looked up to see the back of Lobotomy busying himself with something trivial. A sincerely flimsy pretense for being in the room with us.

“*Chantilly Lace*, right dude?”

“Oh, erh, I ... erhm, didn’t realize ... was it?”

LIE. So ridiculous. SMB raised his eyes to the heavens and then, we all three exchanged wide snorting grins. Success. Mission Accomplished! Lobotomy had gained the attention of “Daddy.” It was just too comical. It was like a game; he knew that we knew what he was up to, but no-one was prepared to burst the bubble. Anyway, it was fun playing. At first.

There’s a move *some* have of singing songs whose titles relate to the task at hand—Buffoon Boy/Control, CH#7. As “Daddy” busied himself with a new project, Lobotomy started singing “*I Just Don’t Know What To Do With Myself*,” the ‘60’s version by Dusty Springfield, which was hardly

likely to register with a younger man than he, of at least 20 years. I started to comment on my observation but he overrode me by getting louder and lapsing into a strange move he had of laughing like a hyena and pointing between SMB and myself—as if we were the *delightfully-naughty* cause of his mirth. A lock of hair had come adrift on a perfectly groomed graying head and was shaking along with the hysterical digit motion. He was full faced laughing now, exposing the weird symmetry of upper head against lower jaw, all lopsided because his upper and lower molars had been removed, on one side of his face. Or, fallen out of their own accord; don't forget, this was Mr. Freebie of the Complete Cheapskate Cooperative and dental hygiene was a priority way down the list. SMB, still absorbed in his task, didn't recognize the tune and didn't look up—*No Approval From Daddy*—so in order to gain access, Mr. Freebie got even louder. I was confused; there was something disturbing about what I was witnessing: Jim Carey in a cartoon movie with guest appearance by Lobotomy Man. It was as if I was privy to something not for my attention. And he maintained that grinning-fool move between Said Moving Bud and myself, for as long as I would have looked on: I was being shown Mr. Smiley Face because the real feeling was too painful to reveal—“I Want My Daddy!”—*Hmm?* I was now in pain. I decided to let us both off the hook and leave the room. SMB looked up at the commotion. At last, success. Again, Lobotomy Man had rested the attention of *Daddy* away from the enemy.

Research Man

I had known SMB for years at other companies, but it wasn't until he came to work for Bossman that we really made a connection. Having studied sociology and social psychology, he came to LA as a profoundly depressed young man for Primal Therapy—the radical findings (at the time of its inception, anyway) of Dr. Arthur Janov, whose general thrust: The imprint that the trauma of birth and early life-struggles leave on people form the basis for most feelings, behavior, and illness throughout life, unless confronted/exorcised in a remarkable fashion. “Informed people,” please forgive my ham fisted summation! If you believe Dr. Janov's theories (which sound fascinating and logical, by the way) then many therapies may be seen as merely “scratching the surface.” Anyway, along with other devotees, SMB traveled to Venice, CA to undergo a form of psychotherapy that he believed spoke so directly to him, and ended up staying and supporting his ongoing therapy with moving. After ten or so years of analysis, he turned around his crippling mental condition, and is a fine example of Walkin the Talk—*Hats off to you, SMB!* Because of his years in therapy, he had a wealth of insight to offer on irrational behavior ... and moving certainly provided an endless supply. I was merely a keen amateur observing, but he was an informed detective listing reasons *why*. Our humorous reaction to the “horror of it all,” was not only entertaining, but also a bonding experience. He had a positive attitude to life and was fun to have on a crew. He was an inspiration to all who dare to pursue their passion; in the face of all criticism, he was following his dream of a career in network marketing and would not be deflected ... and his journey was a long haul. His supporters cheered him on, and his detractors gave him the extra juice to prove them wrong—*its all good*, as they say. And so, SMB reinvented himself as Research Man and became invaluable with the analysis of MWWT and many of the characters in this book.

I lurves ma Research Man.

Parasite Boy

Research confided, later:

“You know, he’s a parasite, living off the actions and ideas of others. He’ll never commit himself to a decision until you’ve made yours. It can be funny, but at times it’s sinister and feels calculated, like he’s maneuvering the situation from a victim’s position. In a sense he’s hiding. He’s a phony and has no backbone. In fact, we should call him Tofu Man. Or, Parasite Boy ... yeah.”

Fair enough, has a certain ring to it.

I called to mind Parasite Boy’s habit of “wearing” his food in a baggie, while moving. It was a leftover custom from SMB’s army days to carry food around in the leg pocket of cargo pants, as vegetarians were somewhat dimly viewed in the armed forces; it was a practice he continued—Imitation, the sincerest form of ~~flattery~~ *please pay me some attention!*

Parasite’s inability to make a decision, was highlighted by the “making of a sandwich.” The customer (a lovely woman) offered to buy us all lunch from a deli she described as *simply the best*. Both Research and myself had brought our own; Parasite Boy was hungry.

“Well, I wouldn’t mind a vegetarian but only if you’re having a sandwich yourself.”

Research Man immediately jumped in.

“She’s not. She’ll only be going if you *and only you*, want a sandwich. You have to decide.”

There was an audible smile at the end of his sentence. Silence. I could see the poor woman was puzzled, looking from one of us, to the other.

“I’d like one ... but don’t go out of your way on my behalf—”

“But she will have to, if *you* want one “

Research Man was taking no prisoners.

“Erhm, well, ah ... no, no, in that case, I’m fine. Fine”

“Are you sure. Last chance?”

“Yeah ... yeah ... I’m good.”

Research played his trump card.

“You know Ma’am, if it’s all right with you, I’d like to change my mind. I’d love a sandwich, since you gave them such a glowing endorsement. OK? OK. So that’s one free veggie for me ... and *only me*.” Here, he glanced at Parasite.

In the end, we all had one. But for that moment, it was farcical to watch Parasite’s dilemma: the passing up of free food because it meant declaring himself openly. As we ate our lunch, Research Man could hardly eat for laughter and when he was able to resume, with a mouthful of food, the convulsions took over again and he had to stop until they subsided. There were times he so lost control ... he began drooling in his sandwich. *Nice!* During the afternoon, we’d catch the others’ eye and the hysterics would begin again. We all shared the in-joke. Parasite too, joined the fun—after all, he was getting his fix: attention, at any price.

*

Research Man was both his pleasure and pain. He somehow felt safe with him (and only him), laying bare his confused views.

- The government’s modifying and monitoring people’s behavior through: Supermarket, elevator, and “on-hold” telephone music; drinking water; legal right turn procedures at traffic signals while

on Red; and the strips of soap that manufacturers add to disposable razors.

- UFO's and related abduction (and return) theories.
- All of his three cars were a step away from citation. As a consequence, legal letters were prominently displayed on the dash of the cars. He reasoned that the police would be less likely to issue a ticket if they believed the owner to be legally connected, or at least think twice before doing so.
- Women's movement to domesticate men—forcing them to sit and pee, rather than stand, by making toilet seats unable to balance upright on their own because of the angle of installation or fluffy material covers (I must admit though, I agree with that one).

And that was the short list! However, there were only so many paranoid fancies that *Daddy* was prepared to let slide. Eventually, Research started grilling him on inconsistencies that demanded clarification. Research was a scientific agnostic; he needed facts. He was unwilling to declare absolutely there was or wasn't a God and was suspicious of those who believed their religion to be factual. Parasite Boy was a devout believer. As with politics, there's very little mileage to be gained in debating faith. So few of us are open to a new idea especially when it goes against our fundamental belief system. For the most part, it's about getting one up on the opponent, and truth is rarely the issue in people's debates. For many, truth is second to agenda .**

Research Man claimed he could never get a straight answer from Parasite Boy regarding Religion. "Always deflecting, like a slick politician. He'll never let go of his faith. Ever. It's become his *raison d'être*. You see Artie, it's all about avoiding the pain and by praying to God, it takes the pressure off deciding for himself. Life's questions—micro and macro, that we struggle with—Jesus, now, tells him what to do. It's all laid on. He doesn't have to think and he doesn't have to feel. His hell is having to make a decision. Parasite Boy is numb and that's the way he likes it. Religion is now his drug of choice."

*

The mandatory oath from a mover is either "Jesus!" or the "F" word. Sustaining an injury from a loose staple underneath a couch, Research Man voiced the "J" word.

"Dirty Filthy Ghandi!" came right back at him.

Research thought little of Parasite's comment, until later. He reasoned that it was a passive aggressive way of responding. He was amused.

"You take the name of my God in vain, then I shall do the same." Parasite Boy declared.

"But it's not the same analogy. I don't feel for Ghandi, as you do about Jesus."

The next time Research Man uttered the profanity, the stakes were upped a notch.

"Dirty Filthy Anton Levay!"

"You think I worship Satan? You're ridiculous."

"Well I don't think it's funny, either."

"Then, why are you smiling?"

Parasite continued searching for a stinging equivalent and even tried defaming Research's mother.

"I don't care. Say what you want."

The antics took a further twist. All three of us were wrestling an awkward piece in a narrow stairwell. Research Man gave me the heads-up and winked.

"Dirty filthy Jesus."

His remark was not because of injury; he was directly baiting Parasite Boy. There was no

response. Parasite stared blankly, as if it were the first time he'd heard such a thing.

"Dirty filthy Jesus, dirty filthy Jesus."

Again, he appeared genuinely nonplused. It was obvious the remark was addressed to him, though he continued to play dumb. Why?

"It's most interesting that he should publicly deny all knowledge of our private conversations. We passed each other in the hallway and he played the Anton Levay card. He said it in a voice so husky, it startled me. Of course, no one else could hear".

"I suppose he doesn't want to share you with others, after all: *Research is my Daddy*." I said.

"It's more than that. He's embarrassed declaring his jumbled thoughts openly. He's hiding."

Hmm?

Parasite claimed to be a reverent soul who sung in the church choir every week, and yet it is on record that his wife couldn't remember the last time he went to church.

"More likely, he's in a coffee shop somewhere in West LA ... he loves to roam."

Again, it seemed that he was promoting a view of himself, that did not ring true.

Parasite Boy's sleep was plagued by nightmares and was never able to get more than four or five hours at a time. He took to wandering around at night and liked to visit the old haunts of his youth, finding comfort in familiar surroundings and memories. On out of town trips, he'd spend his evenings at 24 hour Diners with his trusty back pack and return to bed at four or five a.m. for a shower or short nap before the workday began. He seemed to drift through life in this somnambulistic state ... maybe, that's why she left. His wife of twenty five years, divorced him and moved out, to take up with her first boyfriend. MWWT moved into an apartment on the Westside with his youngest son.

Analysis: Having no opinion? Or petrified of committing to one? The theory running between Research Man and myself, is that Parasite Boy was so dominated by his Mother and Father that he was and still is, looking for acceptance in the form of a viewpoint that does not offend, and longs to be loved and admired. He was robbed of having an opinion in childhood and to this day with people he respects, looks for their reaction before he gives his own—validation, before deciding which way to jump—in almost every aspect of his life. In short, a totally re-active person. Life has it's way and tosses him high on it's turbulent sea. Any decision he makes, he makes because he is forced to ... suddenly, I am sad. I see him as a little boy just wanting love and hugs from Mom and Dad. He was robbed of acting independently by his early traumatic life.

What kind of number was done on you, my man? While I was wrestling with my Dad on the living room carpet, what were you doing?

"All turn quiet I've been here before, a lonely boy hiding behind the front door. I need some attention ... I shoot into the light."—Peter Gabriel.

I'll cry for you, MWWT.

Mainly type A but with none of the aspirations for success. Doing barely enough to skate by. With a mild smattering of C type flavor. Research Man, type B, by the way.

An Amateur's Analysis: Trauma in the Canal

Let's assume for right now, that the premise for Dr. Arthur Janov's Primal Therapy is valid. The (*very basic*) basis of which is described earlier. Here then, is a possible theory regarding our man,

who (still) isn't there.

The little sperm had a big decision to make. Should he go forward or back? Left or right? Even at this point, *life or not* (and *you* can be the judge of that massive moral debate, Dear Reader) was fraught with pitfalls. Pro's and cons. Even if he was aware, he certainly did not have the ability to reason. Not at this early stage, no. I am doing that for him, shedding my interpretation of a little light on the situation.

The determination was made for him. A massive jolt to big mamma's system sent him flying through a maze of underwater caverns. Murky tunnels beckoned him but he just went with the flow. Somehow he made it to shore and shimmied aboard a big white rock.

"I'm so tired, I seem to have been swimming forever; if I can just lay here awhile and catch my breath, I'll be better able to carry on."

So he lay his head down and the moment it hit that hard outer shell—

"*Wohhhh*," he found himself falling down and down, tumbling towards the bottom ... bottom of what, though?

"Wait a minute, I'm not falling, I'm floating."

He was inside what seemed to be a big translucent egg looking out at the scene he'd left some time ago.

"Is this a dream?"

A storm was brewing outside, but he was nice and secure in his refuge. He waited and watched and conditions got worse. He didn't want to leave but the membrane was getting thinner. Finally, the tide rose and carried him out into the ocean and the little sperm's balloon burst its skin in the angry waters, and he was back where he started.

"Should I go forward? ... I think I'll stay here."

He looked around for shelter. There was none. It was all the same—an underworld of wet shapeless form. There were bright lights and shrieks up ahead, and the big storm behind would certainly dash him against the rocks. So ...?

"What to do, where to go? Best to wait ... surely, always best to wait?"

The noise got very loud. Terrifying screams bore down on him as if Armageddon was right around the corner. Though his innate sense was to stay perfectly still; like a man trapped inside a burning building who instinctively feels there is no choice but to jump, he turned and fled. Faster and faster he ran.

"RAN, I'm running now—I've got legs. LEGS!"

The snapping at his heels seemed to be gaining. The noise was deafening and the lights so raw, he could feel their heat.

"I don't want to die, if I could just find my egg. I could hide and make no sound and nothing would find me, nothing would hurt me. I'm drowning in water, WATER? But I'm breathing. How? Nooo, they've got me. Big clamp ... on my leg pulling me. WAAHHH, Noooooooooo—I Don't Want To Dieeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!"

Some die at birth. Most live. Which is it to be for you, my man? YOU CHOOSE.

Out in the light, he was upside down and drowning in fluid, till a hefty slap kick started the baby's engine into drive. Having chosen life, or rather, forced to choose life, he formed new sounds and gulped first breaths in a sterile white room. As a tiny speck of life, he was so traumatized, that any slight movement, back or forward, could mean death; he was stuck in inertia. This physical imprint

at that early stage, too awesome for the undeveloped mind to confront was repressed and so, laid the blueprint for much that was to come. This repression became pain and very little love was forthcoming in childhood to offset the pain.

What do you reckon, Dear Reader? You decide.

* Ginkgo Biloba, an herb good for blood flow in the brain. Lobelia, a flower used for the treatment of respiratory ailments.

**Quote from Dennis Prager, Los Angeles radio talk show host.

CHAPTER 7

Control

Buffoon Boy

“Whachyoudoin’ Sully?”

“Tryin’ to get this frame apart. MAN, it’s in there.”

There’s a certain type of bed frame (metal structure that supports the box spring, which in turn supports the mattress) that is in five ABC pieces. Two sides, two across (one up, one down), and a central support arm. They slide into one another by means of a metal lip into a sheath. A rock solid support base for the Mat & Box (movers’ talk, by the way). Easy to assemble and disassemble—a monkey could be trained.

If the frame has been in position for many years or seen a lot of action(!), the structure feels as if it has been welded together. So, a little inducement is needed for the disassembly: A rubber mallet specifically for putting on and taking off grand piano legs is just the ticket. Rubber against metal. No dreadful clanging. You hit the piece that holds the sheath away from the lip. Usually it slides out, no problem. Once apart, it is easier to transport and store.

Again.

“Whachyoudoin’ Sully?”

“Like I said ... I’m trying to take this apart.”

A tad snippy, this time.

“Erhm ... don’t you think it would behoove you to hammer the correct way?”

“Wha—?”

“You’re hammering the piece together—into itself—try pounding the other way.”

“Erhhh ... oh yeah.”

Course, he went right back to wrong way, pummeling it further into rock solidarity.

“Dude, dude. Like cutting your hair in the mirror, everything is reversed. Hit *here* ... Not *there*.”

“Nah, nah, nah.”

“Listen, give me the mallet ... Give. Me. The. Mallet.”

I rested the tool out of his hand. *Bosh, Bosh, Bosh! Bosh, Bosh, Bosh!* Done.

“... oh yeah.”

That was our man, Buffoon Boy: A lousier assembler of beds, cribs, shelving units, desks, tables, and closet organizers never walked taller and more oblivious among the moving community. In this regard he was unaware, and yet there was a manipulative streak; there’s a great art in doing something so badly, that others offer to do it for you. In this case, it must be said that I was a willing player as his attempt was taking place right outside the front door—blocking all comers, holding up all man/furniture traffic. He should have known better and taken it apart in the bedroom ... but who knows? Maybe, it was a bad day? Or maybe he just wanted someone else to

do it for him. He'd been moving for thirty plus years and was an OK mover and driver, but there were times when he appeared to hit a blind spot, and at the age of sixty he was hitting those a lot. Like a wind up toy that repeatedly smashes into a wall till the juice runs out, I believe he would still be lambasting metal in the doorway, had I not snatched the mallet from his hand.

He had a touch of the Mr. Magoo syndrome; while the world fell crashing in around him, he'd be unscathed, regaling the customer with amusing one liners and moving anecdotes.

"I 'member one time in '71 ..."

"Sully, you've, ah ... left the truck running. It's rolled into the neighbor's wall."

He loved the sound of his own voice. He lurved being the funny guy. Mr. Entertainer, just like his pal, Monologue Man (CH#4)—speaking with great authority on poorly digested misinformation.

Even though our man was a buffoon, he was sneaky, nosy, and charming. The dependable working guy: ready with a joke and a smile, plus an ability to walk into a stranger's home on moving day and make the customer feel at ease.

Sully's expertise was packing: fine china, fragile glass stemware, pots, pans, awkward shaped porcelain breakables; all molly coddled in a cotton wool lifestyle that would baby-sit them in transit till their arrival at the unload. His domain was the Kitchen. It was "his room" on the day.

"What I don't pack, dear, I eat."

Humorous line, and not far from the truth. He'd arrive with an industrial size cooler and begin eating when he'd set up a spot. Once the food was dispatched, the contents of the Kitchen were fair game.

"What does your husband do, dear?"

"He's a lawyer."

"Yeah? We move a firm of lawyers regularly in Century City. Good Guys, good guys. Hey, how can you tell when a lawyer's lyin'?... his lips are moving! *Da-Dah!* Hey, only joking ... So, where are we moving you to, dear?"

He had a need to know everyone's business, and as easily as he came by said info, it was dispatched poste haste to anyone and everyone. Once, I arrived on a job to be greeted by the lady of the house who seemed to know far more about me than a complete stranger had a right—

"Hi, I hear you do voice over commercials. I used to have an agent. Who you with?"

"Abrams Artists Agency."

"Oh wow, that's great. You have a recording studio too, with a partner, that you built in Woodland Hills, right?"

"Erh, yesss ... yes I do."

I was reeling at the amount of personal info given to an unknown party.

How does this woman ...? Oh, so that's it.

In the kitchen I could see Buffoon Boy talking up a storm with the husband. In future, I decided it would be best not to include the Buffoon in quite so many "me details."

The Buffoon & I

Before Bossman, I worked for a number of companies simultaneously, my gun for hire. I was in charge and played one off against the other; it allowed me to pursue creative endeavors without explanation or restriction. When Bossman asked me to join him, he knew of the other guys and

accepted my flexible work schedule—time off for auditions and such. That was the arrangement from day one.

Sully was the “sometimes driver,” when a second truck was needed. I was called in as back-up if the job warranted a third vehicle, or indeed if I was available. Bossman was always angling for me to become more involved and take over the reins with Research Man—the two people he saw as his successors. He wanted to sell the company to us and retire to his dream getaway. Research and myself both knew the considerable time and energy Bossman invested in making his company a success. This was not an attractive proposition and we refused his proposal repeatedly; besides, we had our sights on other goals.

Sully was extremely useful to Bossman. Because of the Buffoon’s financial situation, he could be counted on to work everyday. If the Boss went on vacation, Sully took over and jobs would get done—sloppily, but nonetheless the wheels of Bossman’s empire would still be grinding away. I, however could not be counted on; this was why the Boss tolerated Sully’s sloppy shenanigans, but would often complain.

“Well, look at it this way. He is the engine on which your company runs, when you choose to jet off on vacation.”

Bossman had his favorite lines ... I had mine. I know he bristled at my insinuation that Sully was the measure of his company’s standard in excellence, during his absence.

Buffoon Boy had just broken an expensive sheet of marble by contravening rule#12 in the Handbook & Glossary: *Things A Mover Should Never Do*—carrying marble flat. And on an appliance dolly. A double whammy. Marble has inherent structural weaknesses, and is best transported on edge. It’s the worst combination of extremes—fragile and heavy. Bossman never forgot the incident and would bring it up when it suited his agenda. He had the memory of a chick and was able to call up stuff like this at a moment’s notice. He had a file on everyone.

Sully acted like he was in charge, but in times of a present Boss, was a schlepper like everyone else. Even though I’d been with Bossman longer, it bothered him that I came and went as I pleased. I sensed his concern for me was a ruse.

“Look Sully, I work as I do because I’m focused on other things. Moving has been good to me and I’m grateful, but it is not the sum total of me.”

With this last remark, Dear Reader, I was in no way suggesting that there is anything dishonorable about the profession.

“Yeah, but you’ve got to meet the rent, dude. Last week you only worked two days.”

“That’s my choice and it really has nothing to do with you. Never mind about my finances, I’ll take care of them. Frankly, I’m a little perturbed at the amount of attention you pay my work schedule. Maybe you should pay as much attention to, say, the taking apart of bed frames. *Hmm?*”

I turned sharply and faced him full on. He ignored my dig or missed the point.

“You know, the customer used to be in voice over. Said it was a real tough game. It was five years before she got regular work. Listen, auditions are great, but if you ain’t booking the job ...” he shrugged his shoulders, “a man’s got to know his limitations.”

This was classic staple response from Sully when he wanted to feel good about his situation and also appear somewhat introspective. Hah—fat chance! Completely reactive, he took no responsibility for where he’d ended up in life.

“*AHA!* So there are dream stealers and nay sayers in America. I thought they only lived in

Britain?”

“Wha—?”

“Next, you’ll be telling me that your only concern is for my well being. We all have choices Sully, I work as I do; you do as you choose. If you don’t like it, change the situation. And, by the way, that corny movie line about a man and his limitations means nothing to me. Do you think men who aspire to, and arrive at great achievement, do so because they set their sights low. Why not dare to dream?”

No response ... I heard his stomach growl and knew he’d be thinking about lunch. He frowned.

“When you workin’ next?”

“Why do you want to know?”

“I just wanna know.”

“Well, you don’t *need* to know.”

“I’m curious.”

“You’re not curious ... you’re up to something.”

With information he could chip away at my resolve and that meant control. It was tough to meet the rent every month and missed time at work meant hard times. The “something” he was up to, was the fact that if I was on the crew, he would not have to work as hard.

*

I was not a Great Mover. Thank you though, for your good wishes, Dear Reader. No moving campfire stories to tell about Artie Q. Unfortunately! I was however, a Good Mover with, what Research Man termed “the Edge.” Though I fell short in two of the six categories necessary for entry into the Supreme School of Moving’s Hall of Fame (CH#2/Moving Skills), the areas in which I did qualify, I was cream of the crop. As was Research Man. (He did not drive or load trucks, but was complete in all other aspects.) Once again, not Great Movers, but Good Ones who sprinkled magical fairy dust on our projects from time to time.

The Edge is best described: A mover who goes that extra mile to bring an indelible stamp of originality, resourcefulness, and quality to the task at hand. And, by the way, the Edge is a quality that you yourself may display but it takes for someone else to recognize and voice it. It would not *do* to say such a thing about yourself. At least, that is the way Research Man and myself viewed it. Two other movers must be considered while we’re on the subject. Plate Glass Willy (CH#1) may have had it, but I was too green a mover at the time to make an informed evaluation—I had nothing to compare him with, but I felt like he had it. And Mo (CH#5) displayed the Edge, albeit in his rough and ready manner; it was definitely present on occasion.

So with me on the crew, Sully would be able to coast. Not that he shirked his share of toil, but his work ethic was to take the easy way out. Always the easy way. He was sloppy in everything but was a good packer and never missed a day of work. In this regard, he was an asset to the company. He was delighted when the customer tipped, even if the person was a complete asshole (as happened on the last job). Somehow, the gratuity made everything right in the Buffoon’s mind. I disagreed.

“I’d sooner be treated decently and receive no tip.”

“Had I known he was going to, I would have worked harder.”

“Well that’s the difference between you and me. I wouldn’t. In fact, I couldn’t. I have one gear—the best I can be—and everyone has a right to it, when they’re paying me.”

I wasn't claiming to be some super ethical nut; I just believed that everyone who hired Bossman's company, did so because it was one of the best out there. I loved the fact that it was a company with high standards, apart from Parasite and Buffoon Boy. Anyway, as I said, they had their uses. (Bossman was not a fool and not about hiring dead weight.) Here, there was no advertising—no *Yellow Pages*, no business cards, no flyers—it was all word of mouth, all referral. And those are the best jobs.

I recalled an incident at another company, where a driver returned a tip to a flabbergasted shipper because he felt that by accepting, it validated the customer's poor behavior ... and voiced his feelings, too. It was his way of making a statement, otherwise things never change. I'd never seen this happen before. I felt it showed a man of true character and grace. Buffoon Boy seemed unimpressed.

"Well, that's the difference between you and me. I think the driver was a fool, and the customer a dickhead ... who ... tipped ... well. Hah, hah, hah!"

Touché.

Sully laughed his way through the last three words. It was a habit of his to laugh while saying the pay-off in a joke. Not in between the words, through them. It all came out in a jumbled, yet discernible mass. The only other person I've heard do this is the comedian Robert Schimmel, who laughs through his delivery of the punch line. Strange. Sully felt he scored big with that line.

"So. When ... you ... workin' ... next? Hah, hah, hah!"

All about control.

Bossman

Control. *Aah yesss*, and while we're on that subject ... Bossman was, what I was not—grade A/ every department, one of the Chosen Few. A Great Mover with the Edge. Spectacular. No one could load two trucks at the same time (back to back, connected by a walk thru ramp), organize movers, baby-sit customers, estimate and work the move, and bring it all in on schedule, like the Boss. Similarly with deals on storage units, equipment, materials, rental vans, truck parts, mechanics, labor etc.—a sharp business dude. All round, he was two thumbs way up.

One time, I chipped the top off a piece of glass, coming through a doorway. Bossman took measurements, made a phone call, and dumped the glass in the trash. By the time we arrived at the unload, a glazier pulled up alongside the truck and handed the replacement through the side double doors. It went straight out the other side, down the ramp, and back on the coffee table. The customer never even knew. Bossman was a smooth operator.

"Now that, my dear Chelsea Boy ... that is the Edge."

Research had given me a new name. My Dad had just sent me a beanie from England. The color was what they call Royal Blue with *Chelsea* written on the front—my home town. I lurved that hat. Of course, the glass incident appeared as a black mark in the Artie Q file.

Didn't think you'd get away with it, didja ...? Nah.

Often, the man who prepares the estimate has long since finished his days of moving furniture. To a prospective customer, he'll spin any kind of story to assuage anxieties about a priceless family heirloom, in order to get the job ... because he's not going to be present on moving day. If there are any problems on the day, there's no one to hold directly accountable. There are often missed/mixed

messages between management and workers. In general, the suits don't care; they're not the ones moving the furniture. That is precisely why Bossman's customers loved him—what he said he'd do, he personally did. He was on the crew every step of the way to hold many a frazzled shipper's hand. He was a calming rock in a time of uncertainty. He built up a loyal clientele who'd not make a move without consulting the Boss. Referrals by happy customers were his best advertising. He was one of a rare breed in the Hollywood environs—happy to be what he was—a mover with a great company. Here, was no part timer waiting tables till the big break came. I believe he would have made a success of any company that he set his mind to. He was resourceful and did his homework well, and moving was what he knew. Inside out.

Bird Man: The Early Years

I met him when he'd not yet made the move to go solo. It was a medium-sized company and he'd established himself as their #1 driver. He had other duties, too; one was to dispatch the crews first thing in the morning. Even though I'd come highly recommended—first day in the yard, I was feeling a little apprehensive. Because of my size and slightness of build, I was being dimly viewed by the man in front of me. He must have been 6'4" with a wing span to match. His enormous reach and cut off T shirt made him look like some kind of man/bird hybrid. The perfect specimen, developed by scientists in laboratories for the specific task of loading furniture on trucks and in high-ceilinged storage units.

"Fifty three days straight!"

I looked from side to side, not sure what information was being disclosed, and to whom. He tried again.

"This is my fifty third straight day of work."

My first thought was why would anyone want to, and secondly, what was the point in telling me. I had to smile; it was ridiculous. Here was Goliath in front of David, flexing his muscles.

Daddy, Daddy, look how strong I is!

I decided to take the bull by the horns.

"Oh-kayyy, so what you're informing me is that you have no life outside moving. And, by the way, if you're expecting me to work like that ... you've got the wrong man."

He regarded me for some time and then smiled a heavy lidded stare, that I was willing to bet was the result of a lack of sleep, too much booze and pot, with a "wakey-wakey" gallon of caffeine for breakfast. After the test we got on famously. I learned a lot from Bird Man and we worked well together, despite the height disparity. Going up or down stairs, carrying furniture with someone almost a foot taller, is more effective with the smaller of the two going upstairs first ... it can be tricky. I had not encountered anyone with this level of expertise and marveled at his attention to detail, when it mattered. Though I found him pushy and manipulative, he could be reasoned with and ultimately it was a joy to work alongside such a pro. A hit with the shippers; some of the workers had a problem—the heavy sarcastic wit didn't sit too well with them.

I knew there was tension for control of the company (the boss was semi-permanently absent, presiding over the branch in Northern California) between Bird Man (not yet Bossman) and the office, but just put it down to human nature: Put ten non complainers in a room, guess what ...? Someone will start complaining! Bird Man believed that the boss was not giving the LA company

the support it needed. The boss had been taking the profit from Los Angeles and subsidizing operations in the North, which for the two years since it's inception had been making a loss. The office was loyal to the boss. I was not surprised therefore when Bird Man informed me he was starting his own operation. All the firms I'd worked for (including the present) had little regard for the workers in one area—instead of staging a move over 2 x eight hour days, they'd have the boys out for seventeen hours then schedule them to work the next day @ 6 a.m. and so on ... to squeeze in as many jobs as possible, regardless of the health/energy level of the crews. This was a common cause of burn-out among the guys.

“Mine will be a different type of moving company. There'll be no ball busting days, no jobs over ten hours—”

“Wait a minute, *Mr. fifty three straight days of work.*”

“I know, I know. I know what I said, but that was then. This will be different. The basis for my company will be the best movers I know. I will not burn them out because I'll be right there on the trucks with you—”

“W, w, w, w, w ... with ... *me?*”

“Yes, I'd like you to join me.”

“One thing you must understand before we go anywhere. I've not come six thousand miles just to move furniture. I've got other fish to fry. You know my part-time schedule, I'm not about to give that up ... or the occasional offer of work with other people—I ain't Mr. 53 Straight Days.”

“I'll work with you. This will be a company where the employee comes first.”

Hmm. Brave words.

Bird Man informed the boss of his decision to go it alone and asked for help. He was refused. Bird Man felt let down. What exactly he meant by *help*, I'm not sure (maybe referral of work between the two/loan of materials/equipment/storage space rates—who knows?), but in his mind felt validated in the course of action he subsequently took. Bird Man believed that a lot of the repeat custom had been built upon the body of his work and saw nothing wrong with informing those shippers of his new endeavor. Fair enough ...? A company may have a good reputation but a move is only as good as the 2/3/4/? men doing the deed. So in this case, most were loyal to Bird Man and not the company. However, maybe not so fair, was the fact that he had keys to the office and late one night after a job and paperwork completed, he accessed all names, addresses, and contact #'s of repeat business from the filing system ...

So Bird Man became Bossman and to his credit the company stayed true to his vision and thrived. A successful enterprise. I have seen companies grow from a nucleus of two/three trucks and a small group of movers with a great reputation, to a flabby sell-out operation with a bunch of workers and suits in tow who don't care. Bossman realized this fact and at every turn resisted the temptation of the big buck and a company that was too large and out of his control. In effect, what he was selling was his flair, his panache ... and the only way it worked, was by him being “hands on.”

He was now in his early forties and his career had followed a varied and interesting path. A successful pot dealer and owner of a fishing enterprise down south, showed the breadth of business he could turn his hand to. He managed his moving company with an iron fist but presented a velvet gloved pizzazz to the public. He ran a tight ship. Everything had it's place. There was no slack, no dead weight. Even on the paperwork, his was the only name on the books.

“This will be a company where the employee comes first.”
I’m beginning to see what you mean.

A Trip Up The Coast

In the early days of his new venture (before Lobotomy Man, Buffoon Boy, and Research), we went on a couple of out of town gigs together. One such occasion saw us singing the song, *Do you know the way to San Jose?*

“Oh sure, straight up the 101. Or PCH, if you wanna go scenic.”

We planned to stay overnight and unload in the morning. He’d just bought a brand spanking truck. Customized and tweaked. Sleek and beautiful with no ridiculous logo that characterizes the sides of many LA moving vans. Everyone has seen those trucks parked on a bridge over the freeway, advertising their company. Basically, an eyesore. Their handiwork—a step away from a tagger’s spray paint job, because the owners are on a budget and have no sense of style—falls into the “bigger is better and only way to go” trap. So they put a huge giant, badly daubed on all sides of their trucks and think it looks smart: *Gentle Genie Moving and Storage. Per-lease!* Why not have a canine bowel movement on every spare inch of truck and call your company *Steaming Dog’s Turd Moving and Transfer Service?* Now, THAT may get you business ... but they don’t. No such blight for Bossman though, just a discreet and tasteful sign on the driver’s door. Classy.

We checked into the motel around five p.m. and he’d already started in on the liter bottle of chardonnay that had become a staple of his overnight bag. At around 5:15, I remember the heavy-lidded blank look again. As we were getting ready to leave for dinner, the Manager came to the door.

“Would you mind putting your truck on the street, sir? It’s rather inconveniently parked for our other guests.”

“Oh sure, no problem.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Bossman closed the door and mouthed a *Fuuuuuck Yoooo* to the back of it. Then beamed at me.

“Are you ready to hit the town, Senior?”

“Oh sure, no problem!”

The layout of the Motel was two buildings and a separate office chalet. Twelve rooms to each. Six up, six down. Each structure had twelve parking spaces situated right outside. We had room seven, upper level, building B. It had the feel of an alpine skiing lodge. I opened the door and right away appreciated the manager’s point—I could have reached out and practically touched the top of Bossman’s new baby. The assigned spaces were six and six (per building), and Bossman had parked diagonally across four, effectively taking up eight spaces. He’d parked in this fashion to avoid being blocked in; unfortunately, it was inconsiderate for others, not to mention a huge invasion of view. I had a vision of us warming up the truck @ 6 a.m.—diesel fumes and engine revs waking up the neighborhood.

“Are you gonna move the truck?”

“Nah ... I’ll do it when we come back.”

We taxied into town and had a pleasant enough time. There was a quarter left in Bossman’s flagon of wine and he’d had another two glasses at dinner, so by the time we returned, a few bars later, he

was toasted but coherent ... well, sort of. When we tried our motel door, it was locked. Bossman marched straight to the front desk and confronted the manager; the office had locked us out because of the truck situation.

“If you’d simply move your truck, sir, I can let you back in.”

Bossman was outraged at the manager’s course of action and grew belligerent. He bullied the man into submission, who eventually allowed us back in, but not before Bossman had demanded a refund, insulted the manager’s wife, and claimed that he knew the owners of the motel and would have the man fired. I kept quiet during the whole exchange. *My boy* was getting out of control.

“That’s the way ya gotta deal with these folks,” when we were back inside our room.

“Don’t you think you were a little extreme, dude.”

He gave me the happy shrug of a drunk. The truck still had not been moved.

Out of Control

“Which one of you gentlemen is the owner of the moving truck outside?”

Our motel door was open, with two cops looking in.

Christ ... he called the police.

And so it started again. Still in an obnoxious state, Bossman argued like a retard; he was all over the place. To their credit, the police were polite and reasonable. All they wanted was for him to move his truck into the street.

“But I’m drunk, I can’t drive in this condition.”

He held out both arms.

“I guess you’re just gonna have to take me in, then.”

Oh, don’t say that. Did he just say what I thought he said ...? He didn’t really say that ... did he?

That was it. They’d had enough. There’s only so much reasoning you can do with a crazy person. They took him in and told me he’d be ready for collection in the morning. I moved Bossman’s baby onto the street. I felt like apologizing to the manager. But didn’t. Even though Bossman was clearly in the wrong, he didn’t break the law or hurt anyone (except the manager’s feelings—his wife was very overweight) and after all, Bossman was my boy. I remembered the line (or something like) that Al Pacino’s character used on his brother Fredo in *The Godfather: Never take an outsider’s position against the family in public.*

I met Bossman with a bright and breezy smile the next morning, outside the jailhouse, and in mock theatrical style opened the passenger door for him.

“In this company, we take care of our employees.”

He was silent and got in the driver’s side. During Bossman’s incarceration (after breakfast) I’d done some damage control.

“I called the customer and told her we had engine problems and that we’d be there by ten to unload. Spoke to your wife and told her you were in the shower. Said you’d call her after the job. Everything’s squared away.”

“Oh yeah? Did she say she didn’t believe you?”

“No. Why?”

“I called her first thing this morning. In order to prove who I was, I had to get her to fax my ID to the jail. They wouldn’t let me go without it. My wallet was here in my rucksack,” he patted the bag

“all the time.”

“Oh. She didn’t say a thing.”

“Hmm.”

We arrived at the unload by ten and were greeted by the customer, so happy to see us and her furniture, and so unsuspecting of our travails. Breakfast and orange juice perked us up, but Bossman’s mood was subdued; there was no spring in his step, no flourish about his performance, no lively back chat. I had a thousand questions but he remained uncommunicative, even during the ride home. I knew he was highly embarrassed about the whole thing, so I didn’t push it; I left him to his thoughts.

He’d always been a party boy: Booze, weed, and then caffeine to sober up; I remember my initial impression ... he claims since, not to be an addictive personality, but his boozing MO was not to complement food with wine so much, but more—head for oblivion, ASAP. At least he’d kicked his pot habit when he’d left the old company. The alcohol intake though, was obviously still out of control.

Time to take care of business, dude.

His wife was not a happy camper, and upon our return issued ultimatums. Things grew worse between them, and one day the papers came. Divorce papers. They were served and recovery programs initiated. Bossman turned his life around immediately; he stopped drinking and became a model husband, overnight. One can speculate why. I suspect the cause for the hand shaking was not the giving up of vino, but the prospect of losing most of his wealth and starting life again—working for peanuts on the dollar, alone in a one bedroom apartment in North Hollywood ... by candlelight. I could be wrong.

So things rolled on and settled down. New movers came on board and replaced the tired and worn.

Growing Discontent

Bossman and Buffoon Boy took great delight in bashing me over the head with the negative feedback from the ex-voice over lady we moved. The glee with which they set about trying to undermine my energies was reminiscent of the Old Country. You know, the “What makes you think you’re so special?” gang.

I had been trying to segue out of moving and start to use my creative wits rather than my brawn. Making music was my passion, but I had to be realistic—it was not “an earner.” And in the eyes of an *American Idol* judge, I was over the hill/a little long in the tooth. Suddenly, there presented itself “the wonderful world of the voice over commercial.” It seemed I had a talent. So I made the commitment to give it my very best shot. I had done many auditions and had scored few commercials and was feeling a tad vulnerable. Voice over is a strange game; it could be down to you and one other ... if they go with the other, you may never know. Bossman came on like a locomotive. It was like he couldn’t wait to see me fail, so he’d get more of me on moves or feel better about his lot ... or, something. Still pitching the sale of the company to Research and myself.

“Yeah. Once a mover ... always a mover.”

“Does it make you feel good saying that? What problem do you have with a man trying to shoot for a little more than what he has? Last time I checked, this is America ... you may have heard of the American Dream. How would you have felt had people pissed all over your dreams when you

were starting your company? Or, are you just doing to me what your boss did to you, when he refused to help?”

“A man’s got to know his limit—”

“*Oh, please.* Spare me the homespun philosophies of that other great thinker, will ya? You two deserve each other. And, by the way, Clint said it better ... and you ain’t no Clint Eastwood.”

The basis of the growing and what became an endless stand-off, was my work schedule. It consisted of him trying to badger me into working more, and me standing my ground. It didn’t matter how much I referred to our original agreement, it never stopped him pushing. Like a child that is testing limits, he had to be restrained continually.

“No. Stop. That’s not the arrangement we agreed on.”

He would try every emotional angle to make me feel guilty, and work when *he* needed. I am, at times, what is known as a “soft touch,” and Bossman worked that angle. Worked it good. Even though my schedule was no more than three, four days a week tops, inevitably I’d get home to a message of *war and peace* proportions on my answering machine.

“Ok Artie, you’ve had a nice long rest. Back to the real world. Time to make some real money. Let’s see, now. We’ve got Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday—still needs to be confirmed, not sure if the customer wants us to pack. If so, it may go until Thursday ...”

Oh, for heaven’s sake. I’m gonna make something to eat.

30 seconds later, I’d forgotten something in the living room and returned.

“Sunday, and if the contractor finishes the floor, it’s a go Monday/Tuesday—depending on when it’s completely dry. Wednesday, looks like a green light, need for them to call/confirm. Those three days are real important. We really need you there, buddy. Thursday, Friday ...”

Hey-Zeus, he’s still going on. Oh-oh the toaster!

I ran to rescue the toast but still left that forgotten-something. Back I went ...

“You’re a real asset to the company, I don’t forget that. I take care of my guys; I really need you to be on the team.”

It was so phony; so passive aggressive; so clearly all about him, manipulating the situation for his own benefit under the guise of caring for his guys. Look, everyone is the center of their own universe. I am, we all are. But going along with his lie was something I just wouldn’t do. Granted, he paid his guys OK, but it was a fair exchange for a day’s work done well by pro’s ... and that was the sum total of *being taken care of*. We were independent contractors, not employees. There were no medical benefits, no paid vacations, no supplement of income during the lean times, no safety net at all—which was fine; it came with the territory—doing what we did, the way we did it. The pluses and the minuses: One man’s no workday is another’s flexible work schedule. Come to think of it, there was no pay raise in ten years either, but I was not complaining. I did not complain when booked jobs fell through at the last minute, with no substitute work or pay offered. It was all part of the risk, and this was what I chose. I was down to the nub, worn to the Nth degree. There were even a few times along the way, when I had quit the company—a break from the onslaught, but the shoddy workmanship of other companies drove me back. Some of the guys (like me) who came to work for Bossman were registered with two or more companies—sometimes a lean period at one, was a busy time at another. In the end we all became full time with Bossman. He eased out everyone else. Give him an inch, he’d push and wouldn’t stop till he got the mile ... and then some. You could also say that we allowed him to take it. But ... *this is a company where we take care of*

our employees.

Yeah, right.

I am ambivalent about Bossman. He never short changed me, and once in a while had been generous; but I was never sure if the strings with which a ‘gift’ came attached, were cynically instigated or coincidentally present ... so that when it pleased him, the return favor could be reeled in. It got to a point where I felt uncomfortable and started to refuse the “very occasional gift.” I did not like being beholden to him. We had been friendly, work-friendly—just that, not friends—and it suited him to blur the line.

“I consider you a friend, Artie.”

Hmm.

I responded to this with silence. I was confused. The friendship note had been introduced as a manipulative ploy, and I would not play a friend in this manner. After the voice over bashing incident, I saw him in a different light. As with Sully, I decided not to share any more personal info with Bossman. I’d always been extremely careful in my dealings with him. Even after ten years, every time I booked a work fixture, the info went straight into my book of dates, so no chance of error. I have seen things get ugly when movers stood Bossman up on moving day. His customers believed him to be fair minded in business, and yet every mover who’d worked with him had a different take. If it suited him, he’d find a way to justify anything—“Business and profit determine means; it’s the American way, Artie.” Ask his last employer. I was under no illusion that I’d be sacrificed in a finger snap, if it suited his plan. Strange, my words about PG Willy were equally true, here.

Both Sully and Bossman were alike in some ways. They both shared a need to be in control. With the Boss, he had way more of the need, but as long as it was in regard to moving work, it was fine ... well, tolerable let’s say. Having said that, in the end, not so tolerable. Re: the Buffoon, his control move with me was subtle and all about an easier ride at work—which was not so fine.

Comfort Sounds

On moves where the Stuff Quotient was never-ending, it could have taken Buffoon Boy two days to pack a Kitchen. In a mansion, where rooms are huge and plentiful, six movers may have been allocated a room each to consolidate items into boxes and wardrobes (hanging garment boxes), while two guys wrapped and loaded furniture onto the truck. So, for hours on end the Boys would have been isolated, with only themselves for company. At the end of a day like this, one can go a little stir crazy.

When two movers are in an enclosed space, say an elevator, they can be nose to nose with each other. Some find this intimate setting a little intimidating and by singing or speaking in a funny accent, it allows a communication to be voiced. And it takes (what some consider) the uncomfortable edge off the absence of sound and noise ... I suppose. I’m not sure what’s at the bottom of people’s Fear of Silence, but no doubt there is something. Anyway, Buffoon Boy had this phobia.

I needed some hand towels from the kitchen.

“Sully, do we have any paper towels?”

“Nooooo ... we have no paper towels. No, we have no ...”

The Buffoon was singing to me

“All right, all right. I get the point.”

Nonsense melodies with mundane phrases—Why? It’s too painful to talk normally ...? I guess so.

At first, it seemed like a ridiculous notion that the Terminator would step off the silver screen and be taken seriously in the race for the Governorship of California, let alone win it. However, he caught the public’s imagination in a big way and they decided to give him a chance. During the last week of campaigning before the election, the media was awash with TV clips and radio soundbites of all the candidates. It was in the public’s consciousness around the clock. It clearly resonated with Buffoon Boy.

“My name iss Aarnold. So, ve are out of paper towels, yah?”

I had been sent to help him finish off the kitchen and I spent half a day listening to the man talk to himself, barking commands in silly voices, and singing nonsense songs in order to voice the task at hand. The man was on fire. *Hey-Zeus*, I was catching the Fever after five hours in a room with the Governorator.

“Ve haff to find more paper towels, now.”

“There’s some toilet paper, Sully, downstairs in—”

“No! Ve have to haff the towels. My name iss *Aaaarnold*—I vill not be disobeyed.”

I looked at the clock. Another hour and a half to go. Christ, what a nightmare. It was like baby sitting a child ... he was oblivious. Mister ’Blivious.

Mister ’Blivious

When movers know what they’re doing, few words are needed to convey information. They instinctively know when and what to do. For example: two guys carry a couch; if one affects a certain maneuver, the other responds with the flow. They lift together, they are in sync. Not so with the Buffoon. Every move was documented.

“Comin’ up/Put your end down/Pick and lift/Watch out/Step back/1-2-3—Up/Down/etc.”

All of this is irrelevant when guys are pros. Even when he was not involved, his brain chatter could not be contained.

“Why don’t you use a four wheeler?/Why’re you doing it that way?/Why not—”

“Sully, there’s a bed frame in the Master ... why don’t you take it apart? Preferably *not in the front doorway!* AND, when you’ve finished that, there’s a SHEET OF MARBLE ...”

I hollered at the disappearing back en route to the kitchen, no doubt to gorge himself. Another biting riposte from Artie Q, flying way over his head, no doubt. *Yeehah!*

Following the customer throughout the house on a walk through, included Sully’s commentary: audio and visual.

“This is the living room, remember the suede couch? That’s my favorite couch, by the way. Peach. That goes here and the china hutch, there”

“Couch goes here boys, china hutch over there.”

Research Man and myself found ourselves incredulous at the situation: Bossman’s crew and the shipper, all within 10 sq. ft of one another, being given the woman’s directions parrot-fashion via the Buffoon’s streaming monologues and finger-pointing exerceses.

“Sully, we’re right behind you, we can hear her. It’s OK.”

“OK boys ... OK Boysh ... OKAY, BOYSH!”

He was now in western theme—Walter Brennan or Slim Pickens, or one of those character-actor types from the ‘50’s Hollywood TV shows who used to play the cook in wagon train movies.

“*Woh-oh,*” saw him ushering the walk through onward, as if a trail boss, directing his cowboys to *head em up, move ‘em out ... Rawhide!*

“Jesus, he’s gonna start singing.”

Roll ‘em, roll ‘em, roll ‘em ...

This MO went on during the entire procedure ... on every move. Once again, all about control. All about *I’m in charge/listen to me/I’m important*. And always annoying, that is, if you couldn’t see the funny side. I admit, occasionally I didn’t. The real comical stuff, as always, happened when he wasn’t trying to be the jokester.

*

“I don’t believe it.”

“What?”

“I just don’t believe it.”

“Yeah?”

“The buffoonest move of all time!”

“And?”

“You won’t believe what I just saw.”

“What! Tell me.”

Research Man was standing in front of me, shaking his head in disbelief. He was grinning like a fool, and I was dying to know. I knew *who*, I just didn’t know *what*. I knew this much at least—the *whomever* that was involved, certainly did not have the Edge.

It appeared that Research was helping the Buffoon with a large office table. The table had been dismantled while in storage, and was now re-assembled and ready for use.

Generally, the easiest way to re-attach legs is to put the top face down on a carpet and screw the legs into the table with the aid of gravity and light. Trying to get things exactly matched from underneath, while pushing up, can be difficult. So. It was a rectangular wooden table top with two metal legs. The legs splayed out in a straight line as you looked down on them, but with the table upright and viewed from an end, one leg would describe an upside down T. In other words, . On top of each leg was a small square mounting bracket, so the leg could be secured to the table. All holes matched, whichever way the bracket was positioned; they described a perfect square.

“First of all, he didn’t take the table apart. Now, why Buffoon Boy, of all people, was assembling it, I have no idea. Anyway, he called me to help him put it back on its feet. As I came into the room, I immediately ... *immediately* noticed the legs were round the wrong way. So the line of the legs went in the same direction as the length of the table top.”

Research Man took a break to bury his shaking head in his hands; he blew out a snort of laughter.

“You shoulda been there, Artie ... so I said, ‘Sully the legs are round the wrong way, there’s no stability for the table to stand on it’s own.’”

“‘Nah, nah, nah.’”

“You know how he is. ‘Sully, its going to fall over; there’s no support.’”

“‘No it’s not.’”

“I looked at him with his vacant stare, and realized he didn’t have a clue what I was talking about. I

decided to make my point another way.”

““OK ... OK. Let’s put it on it’s feet.””

“We turned it over and I walked away.”

““Walk away, Sully. Walk away.””

Research continued with a grin.

““Sully. Walk. Away.’ He wouldn’t let go of his side. He was confused. He tentatively let it go, but as it started to tip he quickly grabbed it. He was so sure he was right. He wouldn’t even entertain my suggestion. Completely dismissive of it, in his oblivious way. Again I said, ‘Walk away, Sully.’ I wanted to rub his nose in it. You know what he said? He said: ‘Oh yeah ... *these* legs go *that way*.’ I mean, no responsibility. No *What an idiot I am*, just ‘Oh yeah ... *these* legs go *that way*.’ As if they could go any other way! It was so embarrassing, what with the customer standing right there. Luckily enough, she’s out of it as well. So *out of it* ... what a couple they’d make.”

Speaking of which ...

Sully & Dina

Back in the day when Sully and I were friendly, that is, before he became embroiled full time in other people’s business at Bossman’s company, I helped him out on the occasional side job. I don’t remember much about this gig, other than it was my first meeting with his new, lovely lady in life. As we were wrapping the job, Sully’s pick up pulled into the driveway next to the moving van. Out got “Honey Bunny.” At first I was confused—

Who’s the trailer trash driving Sully’s ... OH ... Oooh ... Oh-Oh!

She had a nice figure and ... all the rest was, *aah-well*. She was overly made up, overly bleached blonde hair, inappropriately short hip-hugging dress/constantly being pulled down ... oh yeah, and drunk. She was also wearing *the sign*. You know, the one that bellows *Victim* from a hundred paces ... one that all owners are blind to, yet everyone else is shocked at how blatantly it’s displayed. She was very different from Buffoon Boy’s description; then again, he was besotted and unaware how she was perceived by others. No introduction, No “Hi, how are ya? I’m Dina, you must be ...?” It was straight down to business.

“Going to Alaska.”

She seemed to be addressing me.

“Now? You’re driving to Alaska, today?”

“Yeah, he don’t care.”

“But it’s his pick-up”

“He don’t care ... I’m going to Alaska”

“You mean: He doesn’t care about *you*; or that you’re driving his pick-up to Alaska?”

“... he don’t care ...”

Okay, fair enough.

I pulled Sully aside.

“She’s driving your pick-up to Alaska.”

“No, she’s not”

“But she says she’s going *now*. ”

“No, she’s not”

I should have figured that one. I mean, would you really be driving towards snow peaked mountains and frozen lakes in a cocktail dress and high heels? And *that*, was the pattern of their relationship—drama. They both loved it. Maybe he picked women who behaved the way he felt inside, and she kept him entertained, distracted. Distracted from feelings. On the other hand, Mister ’Blivious, so out of touch with the consequences of his actions, may have been similarly out of touch with his feelings, too. He spent his life married to whacked out women because “the sex is so much better with a whacko, Artie.”

“But what about day to day living/companionship, dude?”

“Well, that’s wacky too, but it keeps you on your toes. Never ... a ... dull moment. *Hah, hah, hah!* She’s a good girl, though.”

Oh yeah?

Analysis: For Sully, life with Dina was exciting, but in my eyes the drama that was played out was an endless can of worms. I could not imagine a worse nightmare than life with a woman like this. Believe me, Dear Reader, they are a chapter, or rather, book, all on their own. Between the two of them, they had racked up eight marriages and not quite that number in children. A combined life of 100+ compulsive years was littered with relationship carnage and whacked out behavior that would be enough for twenty lifetimes. Both fascinating and depressing. Theirs is the reality show that should be on television: *The Shenanigans of Sully and Dina*. I would watch that ... and I don’t have a TV. “Recommended Viewing ****” Ebert & Q.

Sully allowed himself to be scolded by her in public and reveled in being the “naughty little boy,” which was the role he played on moves to get other people’s involvement—attention. Every conversation that he came upon was highjacked into becoming a vehicle about his own experiences; he had a tenuously related story on any topic already in flow ... it was *all* about *him*.

And any interest shown in another person was purely cynical—how he could use the information to his advantage.

I suspect Bossman and Mr. Sloppy’s past was full of neglect. Unloved and powerless, their way of regaining control was to become controlling. At work, Sully was subtly manipulative while Bossman was extreme—controlling to the power of infinity. God knows what went on in his early life, but everything seemed to be about a battle of epic proportions to gain a sense of balance ... and the irony of it all? He probably had no cognitive idea that he was in such a battle, with himself—Mister ’Blivious II.

Bossman, definitely with his successful business was “top of the food chain/A” type. Buffoon Boy is more tricky to pigeon hole. A steady work ethic placed him mainly with the A’s. However, because of a wife (yes, they got married) who disrupts his everyday life to such a degree and the subtly underhand antics of his, he is in danger of falling into the marginal existence of the C class, unless a serendipitous good Samaritan (i.e. family, state or now, church—yes, he too, has now found religion) comes to the rescue to bail him/them out.

Send in the cavalry soon, boys. Time is running out. “Woh-oh!”

CHAPTER 8

Chelsea Boy

Super Ant

The last straw for me with Bossman came on a job where his estimate was underbid—a rare occurrence.

Written quotes given by moving companies are based on a total time assessment of load, unload, and drive time between the two. This figure is multiplied by the hourly/man rate ... and voila. Sometimes, discounts are given for payment in cash or referral from a friend. If the move goes longer than the projection of time, it starts to cut into the company's profit, but the crew still gets paid for the hours they work. When this happens, management becomes anxious and their concern is made known to all.

For most companies, the driver is held accountable and has to explain why a move has overrun its time frame. An estimator who has bid low in order to secure the move (maybe a lean time for the company) will rarely cop to fact that his part in the equation was partly, or wholly, the reason for the outcome. Generally, it is not a case of fixing *why*, but *who* to point a finger at. He blames the movers, and they critique a poor and unrealistic estimate. In short, no one wants to be held responsible.

On moves that came down to the wire, Bossman was wound tight. Which is really no surprise—Mr. Controlling/losing control/becomes very controlling. *Readers, please see last chapter for details!* Instead of the usual professional demeanor, he was more inclined to snap at the crew. Fair enough, as a driver I had experienced this pressure many times; however, this move was lacking one key element: Research Man. Bossman hadn't underbid the time factor so much, but definitely the amount of guys on the job. Research was busy that day. Maybe the Boss had even planned on him being there ... who knows? So, a five man crew was being fielded by four: Two guys prepping the furniture, loading clothes into wardrobes, and wheeling everything to the elevator; one man packing kitchenware and last minute knick knacks; one man loading the truck; and the one man bringing everything down in the elevator and to the truck was ... missing. For the "showtime! sparkle" of Bossman's engine to be firing on all cylinders and dazzle the public, we needed that fifth guy, otherwise it didn't matter how good the rest of the crew were. It wouldn't be that same well oiled machine. It would be like all the rest of the dross out there. Thus it was a double death blow to the head of a proud Bossman, in terms of profit and performance.

"Watch out. The Boss is in a frosty mood."

"Yeah, we really need another guy. Looks like you're going to be packing all day, Sully."

"Yep, lot of stuff ... lot of sturff ... Lot Of Shturff."

Oh-oh. I waited for the "lot of stuff" song to come ... it didn't. *Wow!*

Actually there wasn't a lot of stuff—there was a *ton* of Stuff. Art and lamps and fragile pieces, all

needing attention. It was a condominium, the usual—dining room/living room, kitchen, laundry room, and patio loaded with plants and outside furniture; upstairs were two bedrooms with walk-in closets. I looked over at Parasite Boy waiting to be organized ... same old, same old.

“You wanna start down here, dude. I’ll go upstairs?”

I knew that if I left him alone in the bedrooms, away from human contact, he’d be wandering around in a daze. Though Sully was oblivious to his own time wasting antics, Parasite’s propensity to zone, brought out the harsh side in Buffoon’s controlling nature. Though the two were friends, he kept him in line with a sharp word. This way, Buffoon Boy could check on him from the kitchen. Between the two of us, Lobotomy Man would be just fine.

At the top of the stairs, I was met with a sea of boxes.

OK. Knock these out, then the furniture.

The best and easiest way to move boxes, hands down/better for the back and long term health, is with arms behind the back. A mover can carry up to double the weight on his back. I kid ye not. A bit like the stance that swimmers affect at the start of a race—the one right before they put their hands out in front. Anyway, I killed the boxes no problem; put them on four wheelers and carton dollies, straight out to the elevator. Took an occasional load down and made the long walk to the truck, help out the Boss. (Let him know he wasn’t entirely alone.) Back upstairs. Filled up wardrobes with coats, slacks, shirts, etc. Pillows, comforters, shoes—“whatever,” on the bottom. Consolidation & efficiency, the name of the game: It takes as long to walk to a truck with one small object, as it does with 13 cu. ft. of wardrobe box stuffed to the gills with a bunch of miscellaneous items—on a dolly, of course.

I prepped all the one-man pieces: night stands; a television; head boards; a small desk; etc. All padded and shrink wrapped, and brought them down—parked on fours, next to the elevator. Looked in on Parasite, made a couple of suggestions.

“Keep the flow going, dude. Take some stuff down otherwise Bossman will have to come up here to get everything.”

Upstairs again. I was an ant, slowly chipping away at the mass, one foot in front of another ... and I watched that mountain melt away. I was on fire. Super Ant. All that was left were heavy two man items: a dresser; a highboy; two queen size electric beds; a Sony monster (TV, that is); and a ball busting armoire that needed four guys, one on each corner. Nothing could be dollied as the wheels were disappearing into expensive shag carpet.

Everything was now saddled up and ready to go. All was done, that I could do alone. I felt like I had broken the back of the upstairs stage of the load. In my mind, I heard Research Man give me the nod, for a job well done.

“There’s the Edge. Right there. Chelsea Bo’!”

I, of course, could not say it about myself. That would *never* do.

Mr. Sloppy’s Mess

“One Good Man!”

That was our signature call when a mover needed help with a piece. Sully was standing next to a circular dining table. Padded and shrunk. He pre-empted my thought.

“Boss said leave it together.”

On a table like this, we usually took the top off. The base was unwieldy and even moving it on its side didn't make the width of the piece any narrower. We tried the elevator ... no go.

"There's a freight elevator—huge, we can get it in there."

"Where is the freight elevator ... do you know?"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah."

I got that intuitive feeling he was BS'ing. On two counts: where it was, and if the table would go in. Mr. Sloppy was in charge and I was along for the ride. Because his judgment was poor, clouded with issues of inflated self importance, I found myself questioning his every decision.

"Awrighty then. You the man, Sully. It's your baby."

With this line, I let him know that I was holding him responsible. To access the freight elevator we had to exit large double doors and wind our way through a maze of gardens, walkways, swimming pools, and Jacuzzis that were all within the complex (which our condominium was part of). Course, we couldn't find it and none of the gardeners could speak English. Had Sully had his way, we would have been out there till midnight.

"So ... which way then, Sully?"

"I think he said it ... was ... erhm."

Oh, brilliant. Just brilliant.

"Look, you said Bossman knows where the freight is, right? *Right?* OK. I'll be back."

I came back into the building as Bird Man's wing span announced his arrival out of the elevator.

"Where Are You Guys ...? Nothing's come down in the last thirty minutes!"

I realized what had gone on. Sully had deserted his post (packing in the kitchen) and Lobotomy had been left unsupervised in the condo. Because we'd got sidetracked with the table project, Parasite was lost to the world and the flow of furniture downstairs had ceased.

"What the fuck are you *doing* up here?"

"Well I was upst—look, Sully needed help with a table. Wouldn't go in the elevator; he said it would fit in the freight."

"*Jesus Christ*, didn't you take the top off?"

"He said you told him not to."

"*Where is he now?*"

I found him dazed and confused, in a neatly groomed gazebo/courtyard structure. Apparently, still looking ... Mister 'Blivious.

"I don't know where—"

"Listen, Bossman is blowing his stack in there. We gotta take it back."

As we came back in, Bossman continued his berating.

"Why are you both wandering around aimlessly?"

I tried to inform him that I was called away from my work inside the condo and—

"Undo the shrink ... And Take This Fucking Thing Apart!"

wwwwoooooohhhhhHHHHH! Sully had *somehow* disappeared and I had to clean up Mr. Sloppy's mess. Typical. F'ing Typical. Why, he'd got involved with this table in the first place, I don't know. Christ Knows. What a buffoon—certainly living up to his name.

As I unscrewed the table top, I recalled an incident, six months earlier where Bossman had snatched a roll of shrink wrap from my hands and told me not to use it unnecessarily. The way he did it was how some adults demoralize children ... in public. I was *steaming* and followed him into

the elevator. Only when we were alone, did I say something.

“I know you are the boss and you have every right to tell me how you want things done ... but I really don’t appreciate you treating me in such an inconsiderate fashion. I am not a child.”

There were other reasons than just the overuse of shrink that set off that incident. This one was all about control. Lucky for us, Research Man turned up around 2 p.m. to save the day, and by the end, Bossman was all smiles—like nothing untoward, bizarre, and unsuitably fucked up to the N’t degree had happened. I, however, was seething at the humiliation of what seemed to be a developing trend in public tongue lashings by the Boss and fully intended to speak my mind. The circumstances were not conducive, so I decided to call him later that evening.

Mirror Man

I do some of my best thinking in the shower and had come to a decision while washing away the day’s dirt. When you live alone, in order to get the kind of objective balance that a wife, husband or friend would bring to a conversation, one is forced to talk to the mirror. For me, it’s the one in the bathroom. I have found the older I get, the more my skin has dried out. So now, naked and toweled off, I began applying a moisturizing body lotion. I like to start with a dollop in my hands, work it in thoroughly and from the head and shoulders, work down. I faced my reflection and presented my plan.

“OK, here’s the deal. If you want me to continue working for your company ...”

All right. Face, don’t forget under the eyes and lids. Good. Now, neck.

“my rate of pay has just gone up by a dollar an hour.”

Arms. Watch that little area of wrinkles on the inside of the elbow. Not the outside, the inside. Yeah, that’s right.

“Everytime you pull one of your inappropriate shenanigans ...”

Flexed muscles definitely look better greased.

“like you did today, its going up by a dollar an hour.”

Stomach, back and butt. Okay then ... a little dab on Mr. Johnson. That’s enough, thank you!

“Take it or leave it.”

I finished by massaging thighs and calves. Surprise! I found myself very reasonable.

I like that guy in the mirror; we should keep him.

Mr. Controlling would be less so. Rather than take it or leave it, it was more likely that he would try and bargain, knock me down, 50 cents or something. *Maybe I should make it two bucks, then?* I figured this approach—to hit him in the pocket, to be the most rational and effective way of making my point. His behavior would not change because of anything I might say (look at our history), but a loss in profit may be perceived by him as a loss in control—and *that* may affect a change.

By the time I’d eaten, I was not feeling quite so sure of my plan; he may just tell me to get lost, and having set my limits I would be forced to walk. Then again, I knew he wouldn’t want to let me go—he recognized the value of my worth; he’d take any piece of me rather than no piece. It was the reason he tolerated my last minute auditions and part time work schedule. On the other hand, he may have become weary of our endless dance. I know I had. After a while, I was wondering if it was worth any kind of phone call ... maybe just let it slide—I mean, *everyone’s entitled to an off*

day, Jesus!

I started to pace the room. *Hmm ... Nothin' else for it—I went back to the mirror.*

Whadya think I should do?

“Listen, Artie. If you don’t stand up to him, it’s never gonna change. In fact, it’ll only get worse.”

Look, I never said I wouldn’t call ... but, maybe ... I dunno, maybe I should cut him some slack?

“SLACK ...? After what he said—‘*Scuse me, the way he said it. That is not in the job description of an OFF-FUCKING-DAY. Fuck that and Fuck him!*”

Wait a minute. What about my plan?

This guy was not as reasonable.

“Fuck the plan. He can’t be allowed to treat people this way. You gotta give him a taste of his own medicine. DO IT ... and do it NOW.”

I didn’t know what to do. I was all steamed up. I wanted to let it out. I had to tell someone and it may as well be him.

But what about the plan?

“FFFFFFFFUCK THE PLAN,” roared the man in the mirror.

Grudge Match! Mirror Man Vs Mr. Controlling.

I made the call.

“I’m gonna be honest. I am *very angry* with you.”

“OK, lets talk. You’ve got the ball.”

Bossman was a fan of Dr. Phil. Big fan! Ever since the divorce papers, he been watching Oprah shows and reading every self help paperback he could get his hands on. I’m sure this was a bullshit buzz phrase that he picked up from the *Dr. Phil TV show*, verifying the old adage: *A little bit of badly sourced knowledge should be kept well away from self educating half-wits.*

“I understand that the job went longer than the estimate. I understand that we were short a guy. I busted my hump for you today because I knew you were in trouble. I’m a driver, I know about estimates. The table was not my project. I was helping Sully out because he asked for my help. You had told him to leave the top on the table.”

So far so good, a little quiver in the voice at the start, but I got it under control now. Firm.

“I don’t remember that ...”

“Well that’s convenient isn’t it, because Lobotomy remembers you saying it as well.”

“Artie, I had a lot of stuff on my mind. Sully should have known better and taken it off. Maybe, even *you* should have—”

“Exactly. That’s exactly my point. This was Not My Project. Don’t turn this around on me! This belonged to *Mr. Sloppy*—the man you leave in charge when you jet off on vacation. I was merely helping him out, helping *you* out, actually. It’s not my fault that you underbid the job. Or, that you lost control and started getting shitty with your crew *once again*. Let me tell you something, if you fucking speak to me like that again I swear I will do some Fucking Damage! I will FUCKING SNAP! D’you hear me ... *ARE YOU FUCKING LISTENING!*”

Of course no-one was listening, he’d gone. Shaking from the force of my rant, I was dry mouthed and *clacking*. I’d had my run-ins with Bossman before, but nothing along the lines of what had just taken place. A big festering mess. This was a new plateau in our relationship. The words were bad

enough but the power that snuck up on me, at the end there, had me railing into the receiver like Flamenco Boy ... without the phone smashing, that is. I'd never spoken like that to anyone. Ever. I hardly recognized myself. I've often wondered what I might have done had he been standing in front of me—I would not have been responsible for my actions. Seriously. I now understand why people on trial, say such a thing. It was like I was enveloped and carried away on a feeling not of my own. Where had it come from? Whose was it? Then I remembered Mirror Man: *The voices told me to do it*. Oh-oh. Isn't that what every madman in history cites as the reason why he's just committed some unspeakable horror?

GRUDGE MATCH II—Chelsea Boy Vs Mrs. Controlling

Two years ago my big sister came to stay. I met her at the airport. The moment I entered the arrival lounge, an old man slipped on the floor and fell right in front of me. Naturally, I bent down to help him up. As I rose, I was confronted with the image of my sister, pointing to her cheek. She was indicating a spot where I may be *allowed* to kiss her. She was giving me permission. Suddenly, a wave of old and very familiar feelings engulfed me. The veil of time had been lifted and like a bad memory that we repress and forget with our cognitive mind, the subconscious side never forgets. *Ah, the Good Old Days!* I now remembered very clearly the way she used to treat me. Guess what? Even after forty or so years, she was still prepared to play out the same old games. Manipulation and control.

During her visit, critique of me and America flowed freely. I tried to make her stay pleasant but was wilting under the scrutiny. I'd had enough of the same old MO. It was going to stop. I exploded at the end of a visit full of put-down remarks and withering looks—a British trait that I admit I still wrestle with. It is a horrible quality. Once I calmed down, I was able to put my thoughts on paper and express myself clearly to her.

What is it about controlling people that provoke such a huge reaction from me? Do I seek them out because I need the presence of someone/anyone to do battle with? If so, (why) am I recreating my past in the present?

The Aftermath

I had no clear idea what Bossman's reaction had been, since he'd simply hung up on me. It was several days later, and with a cooling off period under our belts, I wasn't even sure there was any relationship left. Before the Exploding Mirror Man incident, I had agreed to three days of work. He usually called the night before with the next day's info: start time, name of shipper, address, etc. ... that night was the deadline for the first day of work. I'd dug out my B list of moving contact #'s. If he didn't call, I'd phone around in the morning for work at "Sloppy Seconds." I didn't relish the prospect.

If I could just score a couple of voice over gigs ... "Gotta pay the rent, dude."—OK, Sully! Oh well, such is life.

I honestly didn't think he'd call ... well, he did. Even more surprising was the fact that he made no mention of what had transpired the last time we spoke, which I found really bizarre.

"OK, your start time tomorrow is 7:30. I'm gonna need you to—"

“W, w, w, w, w. We gotta talk. I’m not gonna pretend like nothing happened. You may remember our previous phone call and your response.”

“Well, I didn’t want either one of us to say anything we’d regret.”

Hmh. Strange, I certainly had no regrets about anything I’d said, or even the way I’d said it. This time I laid out a few concise points regarding his behavior, all calmly delivered. Again, I made no mention of my plan—*my hastily discarded plan*. At this point, I would have felt weird turning this whole thing into a money issue; for me, that was not what it was about. He apologized for his conduct. His *let’s try and put all this behind us*, made me realize that nothing had changed. Nothing had been resolved. It was all just words. Stuff and Nonsense—Feelgood Bullshit. Now though, he’d be on his best behavior for a while, then it would come full circle. He could not escape his controlling nature as I would not stop fighting being controlled. The trick for me, was to find out why it manifested itself in such an explosive manner with Bossman. I was resolved on one issue, though. The next time an incident of this magnitude threatened to rear an ugly head, as it would, I’d simply walk. No discussion. No dramatic confrontation. No good-bye, even.

I decided to call my B list, anyway—share out the load/back to my old work MO. I wouldn’t cut out Mr. Controlling completely, I’d simply ease up on the amount of time I was giving; let him know he wasn’t the only game in town. Take back some of the power. Maybe *absence* really would make his heart grow fonder.

Yeah, right. Hey, the Old Plan is dead ... long live the New Plan!

Research Man’s Analysis of Artie Q: The strongest manifestation of your Primal Pain is the behavior of “separating” from others. I say this because needy people trigger you—Mr. Sloppy, RM Dude, Bossman; you end up feeling stifled, overwhelmed. This could be an indication of birth trauma, where you were stuck or squeezed. In the present, when you feel smothered by someone, you want to run (i.e. get away from the “old” pain of having been crushed physically), so you *separate* from them.

Another reason might be an *old* feeling of having been left alone as a child—away from your parents, over an extended period of time. This would translate to the human organism as a feeling of “not being loved.” It may be slight and you may be totally unaware of its presence, but it’s there and in behavior—*The body never lies*, Dr. Janov. You are a loner, not with the mainstream, you go your own way; by “acting out” in the present, in this “separating way,” you unconsciously try to recreate that traumatic environment with those original emotions (alone, lost, etc.). This separation trauma may also give you trouble establishing intimacy or a bond with women because of the distance you’ll seek, if they are clinging.

On the other hand, having a negative reaction to needy people is possibly an aspect of having been around primary care givers who required support from you. If so, your critical emotional needs may not have been met as a child, which would create some Primal Pain. When someone (now) clamors for attention, it will provoke the pain of not having had your *old* needs met (having had to try and fulfill those of your primary caregiver). A child is not equipped to deal with the unmet, emotional requirements of a parent. Had this been the case, you would have felt manipulated, frustrated, and again overwhelmed.

Also, you react *big time* when someone is unjust, which should be a “normal” response; however, I believe there's more to it with you. I think some underlying pain gets brought up here. A possible answer: that you were treated unfairly on occasion, or over a longer period, as a child. I feel I can

detect this in you when you encounter certain situations, such as with Bossman. I think Bossman clearly stands as a representation of a person from your past.

Chelsea Boy, you're a type B mover with the Edge (I know you cannot say this about yourself!) and two steps away from induction into the Supreme School of Moving and Storage, as you have already stated.

Artie Q Responds: *Wow! That's me?* Thank you Research, my friend. I shall leave the final analysis up to you, Dear Reader. Make of me what you will. Feel free to draw your own conclusions. Just know that I was not capable of training that keen microscope on myself.

CHAPTER 9

Lost Souls

It's been two months since my Gunfight at the OK Corral with Mr. Controlling. As predicted, Bossman has been on his best behavior and is being nothing short of downright pleasant; it's as much as I can do to stop myself tearing his head off. Though I have my "New Plan"—cutting back on the workload—the two days I spend in his presence is wearing. I am mono-syllabic and polite, but won't be drawn regarding his fluffy chit-chat. I believe I'm behaving like a professional. Research Man claims I am acting like a caged animal. A silent one.

Man, I got take this load off my shoulders; how can he be so agreeable, and I'm still so ready to do battle?

I realize I haven't had a Mirror Man exchange since *that* evening. In fact, I've hardly given it a thought. I must admit I am suddenly curious as to who will present himself if I close my eyes and will them to appear: the Good Guy or the Whacko? I head for the bathroom.

OK. Here goes. In position. Ready ...? Hmh.

Nothing, no-one home. Just me, squinting at myself.

"What are you doing, dude? Expecting someone?"

Well, I was, rather ...

Back into the main room of my single apartment and turn off the lights. The outside lighting is not yet on and we're in that weird changeover period to Daylight Saving Time—inappropriately coming on at 5 a.m. and checking out at 1 p.m.!

Drawing back the blinds, I look through sliding glass doors at the surrounding building. The pool that my unit looks out onto during the day is nothing special, but in the wee hours it is very different. Underwater lighting and the flaky lime green of the pool bottom give it a tropical feel, and though Santa Ana winds are blowing in a ton of debris, all I see under a nighttime sky is a rippling, glowing mass lighting up the complex: a magical image. Gone is the peeling paint, misty green pond-water, and dirty lawn chairs of the daytime. With the glow casting dull shadows in my room, I sit, second or third glass of wine in hand, staring into the luminous body of water. The constant flickering on the surface is hypnotic, soothing, numbing. I see faces from my past; I see the faces of lost souls ...

Rock n Roll Mike

It was the end of an era: The final days of the big-hair bands on the Strip, before grunge, rap, and alternative music wiped the slate clean. Out with the old, in with the new.

I was green, straight off the boat; I'd been moving for two months—working my way through the ranks—and was thrown prematurely into the role of driver. Most of those early rag-tag companies

were desperate for drivers. They'd use any face who came in through the front door as a helper, and anyone who showed a smidgen of initiative was promoted ASAP.

I was completely unprepared to deal with a house full of art, or anything really, other than a square-ish piece of furniture or box. Somehow I muddled through it all, though not without my share of freaking-out and damages. Walking into a mansion in Bel Air, knowing that I was the man responsible for the safety of expensive items in transit, took my breath away. Here was no set up the likes of Bossman's standard in excellence, or even the company where I'd first met him. A truck, a ramp, one 4 wheeler, one box dolly and one appliance dolly—and *that's* if you were lucky. *Good luck buddy, you're on your own.* There were no A frames, no rolling computer carts, no masonite, no catch-all carpeted moving tubs, no riser extensions for the 4 wheeler—those extra special features that not only make a mover's life easier, but present that professional snap to the public. This was a cowboy operation that took no time to safely box up sculptures, pictures, and lamps, or prep suede and leather couches. Forget about crating up a long thin piece of marble/oil on canvas 9' x 11'—whatever the size. I'd never heard of Styrofoam peanuts for packing an ornate glass chandelier ... I was way out of my league.

Peanuts anyone?

Sure, I'll take some with my pinot grigio. Thanks.

As I said. No idea.

Rock n Roll Mike was my helper, a wannabe guitarist (of an Ozzy type band) in his late twenties. The present company had a relaxed dress code and his "look" at work, was the same as it would have been on stage, I suspect: Long black hair, black baseball cap, black sleeveless T shirt, black jeans, black leather boots ... I'm sure you get the picture. The only difference would have been a crucifix or earring added for live presentation. He would make fun of my lightweight pop music, though offered none of his own for scrutiny, and no-one else in the company had heard him play. He'd spent the last five years *getting his look down, Man!*

Hmm? Something was not adding up, here. I mean, if there was anything that he so obviously *did* have down ... it was his look. He showed little motivation at work, but was strong and careful. Performance grading: Adequate.

It was a particularly stressful day for me: Impossible estimate; trying to inspire a helper who'd rather be off somewhere drinking beer; difficult pieces; equipment from the stone age; customer not packed ... I was overwhelmed. I called the office for back up ... extra guys? No such luck. I knew the only concern shown by the suits, would be at the end of the day: *D'ja get the check?*

Thank you management, for your "concern."

I felt completely alone, like I had no-one on my side.

Loading a truck is done in tiers. You finish one wall, then build up the next, and so on till the truck is full. I knew that much, at least. In order for each tier to be stable, everything should fit snugly. A secure load is a happy load = no damages while the truck is moving. I was frustrated that I couldn't complete this one tier, and move on to the next. Nothing seemed to fill the gap in a wall of furniture. It was hot and I had a headache.

"Fuck it."

With my foot, I started mashing a large box into a space that was clearly not big enough. Regardless of what was inside, I was going to show that box who was the boss.

"What's ... My ... Name. There now, how do you like that? That showed you. You Fuck!"

I was ranting at a crushed, inanimate object. I turned to find Mike, behind me, silent and staring.

Oh, Christ.

I was embarrassed at my lack of composure, shamed by my inadequate skill. He was holding his jaw.

“What’s the matter, man?”

“My teeth hurt.”

“What do you mean?”

“They always do when I work with you, Artie. See here. Thith one ... chipped. When you get frazzled, man, I pick up on your stress ... and my teeth hurt.”

It appeared that he was grinding, under pressure from me. In his sleep, too. Because his front teeth were worn and thin, they’d started to crack. Even though he wasn’t much support, I liked Mike and felt bad for him ... and me.

I gotta get this under control.

It was with a huge sigh of relief that I was able to collect payment at the end of the day and head home ... only three hours over the estimate and two damages (they weren’t biggies), and that made it “a good day.” As we were in Mike’s neighborhood, I dropped him off in front of an apartment building. I turned off the engine and sat quiet. I’d been thinking about what he’d said earlier.

“Listen dude, I’m sorry for my behavior at work. I’m gonna sort this out.”

“Hey maaan, I shouldn’a brought it up. Hey. ...”

“No, no. You have every right to. I’m pleased you did, actually. I just feel like the job is too much for me. Really. I know what it does to me; I didn’t realize the effect on you.”

“Dude, forget it.”

“No. Mike, I am gonna sort this out.”

“OK. So, erh, d’you ... wanna come in?”

He was an intriguing character who would not get drawn into specifics. None of us knew exactly where he lived, why personal mail was delivered to the work address, checks cashed only through the office manager, no home phone—something was going on. So when his invitation came, I almost shouted: *Are you kidding? Try and stop me!*

I tried to sound relaxed, and shrugged.

“Sure, why not?”

We walked to the side of the building and down a ramp. He pulled out a garage clicker. The security gate let us into an area where cars parked under the building, but the driveway was in the open.

“DUDE ... one of these is *yours*?”

Mike rode the bus to work and hardly ever had two pennies to rub together. As we walked down a line of cars, I could not imagine which was his: luxury saloons, the occasional classic muscle car ... *Wow! Who knew?* I guessed it had to be the Honda Accord, for we had come to the end. He stopped, scoped the area and turned in between the Honda and Corvette. We came to a wall where storage lockers hung above the hoods of cars, and underneath was a small doorway—a kind of hatch where I imagined gas or electric meters lay beyond. He bent down and I heard the sound of keys against metal.

“Mike, what are we *doing*?”

He turned with a smile.

“Welcome to my Underworld.”

It was the portal to his domain: a crawlspace behind parked cars, beneath storage units, and under the building. I stooped to enter, but once inside, was able to stand. Just.

“Watch your head, bro.”

He switched on a light and I found myself in a small neat space. There wasn't a floor or walls as such but a sloping dirt incline, packed down hard and adorned with rugs; it gradually rose to the ceiling. “The room” was sectioned off at each end by a dark sheet. Scarves, bandannas, and paisley patterned cloths hung billowing from beams; three painted light bulbs; and a large sequined floor cushion all gave it a Gothic/Bedouin tent-feel. A sleeping bag and two plastic bowls (one for personal hygiene, the other for kitchenware) were stacked at one end of the space. Here, the ground was almost level, which was where I supposed he slept. An extension cord snaked down from above and powered light, boom-box, and electric razor. A cheapo electric guitar at the other end was plugged into a Rockman (tiny Walkman-like amplifier for guitars which duplicated the sound of a heavy electric). A small stool and headphones lay nearby. Carved into the dirt was a shrine to the hair bands of the Sunset Strip: A guitar pic, leather wristband, ticket stubs, a studded dog collar, beads and bangles all around the centerpiece—a picture of The Man, Ozzy, mock-eating the head off a bat. On both sides were candles and incense.

“Dude, this is fantastic.”

“Really. Think so?”

“This is way cool.”

“Yeah, I try to keep it nice.”

“This is ... this is like staying at a Vegas hotel, Arabian Nights style. You could bed a chick here, man. This is not shabby!”

I surveyed the scene again, taking my time, drinking it in. Even though it was basic, he'd used imagination to make his hole, habitable. Shabby chic, indeed! I was also relieved to see the guitar, and that all his talk was not *just talk*, if you get my drift.

Now, if he can just play that. We're in business.

He fished in the corner and produced two beers from a bucket of tepid water. He gave a smile, “sorry dude.”

“How did all this ... come about?”

He took off his cap, sat on his guitar stool and lighted candles and incense. I was honored—getting the five star treatment. I settled into the cushion.

“I used to live here as manager, five years ago, with my girlfriend. Man, one day, about three years now, she split, never came back. I guess I fell apart. I hid from the world and ran up a bunch of bills. I just didn't care. The bill collectors came ... so I disappeared. My buddy took over as manager; he let me stay on in a vacant apartment. Then, when it rented, I ... came down here. *Hurh!* I run a line from my man's place upstairs and use his bathroom. In return, I keep an eye on the building—security, do a bit of maintenance. I keep a low profile.”

“Surely, people see you come and go.”

“People are cool, here. Everyone knows me, man, they don't care. ‘Sides, I'm useful. I know how to fix things. I know every inch of this building. That's how I knew 'bout this place. I got a lock on the door. If anyone breaks in, man, there's nothing I can't get back within a few days ... 'cept the Ozz over there.”

He looked over at the autographed picture and back at me with a big grin.

I gestured towards the guitar.

“You play that thing ...? Play me something, anything.”

Before he could object, I put on the headphones.

“I got my beer. I just need me some sounds, *Man!*”

*

Over the next few weeks, I gave a lot of thought to my situation. It was obvious I was not qualified to be a driver; in fact, I dreaded going to work. What was next—panic attacks, migraines, medication, self-help books? I decided to make a change.

I got a call one night.

“Dude, how’s it hangin’? Miss seein’ you, bro’.”

“*Mikey* ... you mean, you miss the teeth grinding? I’m sure you do. I had to get outta there, dude. What’s goin’ on?”

“Man, I was just jammin’ on the axe. I been thinking about what you said a few months ago—”

“Mike, listen, I’m just sitting down to eat. Can you call back in fifteen minutes ... Mike, did you hear me?”

“Yeah, erh, OK dude. Don’t want to bother you ...”

“S OK, just give me fifteen, all right? *Mike?*”

“Kay.”

“Call me back, right? *Right?*”

“OK, man.”

I never heard from him again. He told me he was raised in an orphanage. Because of my limited musical success, in England anyway, I think he looked up to me—sort of a big brother thing. I was encouraging; he procrastinated a lot. Too much, I think. Looking to be the perfect player before he went out live.

“Learn by Doing, dude. We’re not talking about the rigorous playing structures of classical music or jazz. This is Rock n Roll. Get out there and make a few mistakes in front of people—most of ‘em won’t know anyway—and I guarantee it’ll teach you more than sitting at home practicing. You’re good enough now. Do it ... and you’ll wonder why you didn’t do it sooner.”

Mike was what some say about me—too sensitive. Of course, this is a convenient justification for their inconsiderate treatment of the creative type. In order to create, one has to be open to suggestion and nuance, and that means to be aware ... sensitive. You can’t just shut it off, it’s not that easy; ‘sides, everyone is capable of being *too sensitive*—you just have to find their buttons.

He was a gentle soul, a lost soul who’d fallen through society’s security net. I mused that in another few years he’d either be in an Ozzy tribute band or pushing a shopping cart through LA’s alleyways. He’d have been perfect in one of those hair bands, unfortunately their days were numbered.

If he could just adapt to the new music ... who knows?

T Man

So, I quit the firm and joined a professional outfit as a helper to relearn the business properly. In a few years maybe try driving again, but at that point, I didn’t even want to think about it.

I watched the crews and learned every move and skill. I made it my business to be the best in the company; if anyone no-show'd at work, I wanted to be the next phone call they made—their go-to guy. I started to get a handle on the way things should be done, and over a period of time I believed I could do a better job than some of the drivers. *Maybe I'm ready?*

In order not to blow my gig as a helper (I enjoyed working in that capacity), I moonlighted for another company, one day a week. It gave me a chance to try out my driver's hat, with no pressure if it didn't work out I was much better prepared this time. It was a slight step up from the first nightmare, but compared to the operation I was at, it was still Mickey-Mouse; having said that, I gained invaluable experience, learning all the time—mostly, what *not* to do.

There was a revolving door of C type helpers and drivers (human flotsam) who did the rounds of moving companies in the area. They got fired from one and moved to the next. It was a small world, so in time they wound up at the start, again. Bygones were usually bygones unless the reason for their dismissal was serious.

All the good helpers were taken by the main guys, so the last minute/relief drivers tended to get the ass-end of the helper pool. As I was low on the totem pole, I got the jobs and workers no-one else wanted. The main crews were dispatched first thing and I was usually scheduled last in the morning. Coming through the back door of the office, I could see who they'd lined up for me. Occasionally, it was a previously fired helper, eager to make a fresh start and had come in early; sometimes I got lucky and found one of the regular guys waiting; the other option: a complete unknown. I never got tired of that experience—seeing who I'd end up with as I came in the room.

Oh yeah ... I remember you. Weren't you the one who ...?

This was a new guy. Tall, long hair, preppy ... sort of, with glasses. Trevor, the office manager made the intro.

“Hi Artie, *late as usual*. Here's your paperwork and this is your helper, Tom K.

I turned and shook his hand.

“Hi.”

“Hey, how yoo doin'”? Nice to meet you, Tummy K.”

I nodded. Back to the office manager.

“OK Trevor, anything I should know about the shipper? Anything you haven't written on the docket, that you feel I should be aware of ... *Women leaving their husbands/Cash only/Need to get payment before I start the unload/Tenants being evicted by their landlords because they haven't paid the rent and will they be able to pay us?*”

I'd learned a few tricks along the way.

I liked Trevor. He was a Brit from the North of England and the periodic word rang loud and clear in his original dialect. Though he was losing his accent, he'd not lost his dry, understated wit. His analysis of the public was way-off though, especially women.

“Artie, I'm shocked that you should think so little of uz and our customers. No actually, she's a very sweet and lovely lady—”

“You said the same about the customer last week, who turned into a wailing shrew because we put a crease in her dust ruffle.”

“That was different.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yes. She was going through a divorce. A stressful time. You know, Artie, it's called *moving*.”

“And then there was the woman who stiffed us on payment. She had persuaded you to bill her for the move and never sent us—”

“Look ... *jus go and do the job, will you?* Here’s some mernay for gas.”

“Mer-nayyy?”

“*GO, you’re late.*” He threw the cash at me.

“All right, all right. Don’t say I didn’t—”

GO! he mouthed, and pointed to the door.

*

The Englishman was OK. He did his best within the mean confines of what he had to work with. It was the boss who was a pain. (The man whom Plate Glass Willy had had his legendary confrontation with. CH#1.) He was penny wise and dollar foolish, spending all day hunting down a screw that could be bought round the corner for a few cents extra. He applied this logic to everything, especially the trucks.

A shattered quarterlight or smashed side view mirror was not considered a priority and rarely got fixed, but the broken fan belt and cracked manifold did; the quality of maintenance was basic, though. Oil leaks were common but not a “cause for concern.” Drivers were encouraged to solve the problem with a piece of cardboard. Because so little attention was paid to the trucks—inside and out—they looked like a haven for the homeless, with graffiti occasionally making an appearance. Once, a customer requested that I pull around the back and load through the alleyway, so horrified was she at the state of the truck in front of her Beverly Hills’ home. I forgot the cardboard move, and so, left her with an oil puddle in the driveway c/o Mickey-Mouse Moving Co.

The equipment on board was poor, and the furniture pads were filthy from years of use and abuse. The floors were uneven and unfinished, making it difficult to slide furniture and easy to sprain an ankle. When it rained, some of the trucks leaked, especially the area around the deck (the small box-like space above the cab, reserved for small/light items of furniture) and patches of moisture would appear on an arm or back of an easy chair or ottoman, having soaked through a pad. During a heavy spell, the floor around the doors got warped (more than usual)—dangerous. In warm weather, splinters were a problem; they found their way into the pads, socks, and hands of movers. All, but one of the trucks were freight or cargo delivery vans, modified for the use of moving because the boss had scored them at a good deal. Moving-ramps should be wide, with a lip that sits flush on the floor of the truck. Problem was, the ramp that comes with this kind of freight vehicle was too narrow to be used safely for moving. They fastened underneath the carriage, so access in and out, meant a step up or down. Carrying a couch off the van and having to “feel” for that step with a foot was a tricky maneuver. A few times I’d seen accidents as a direct result of that *missed step*.

All four of the fleet were parked behind the office—a driveway, backing onto an alley. This was a bad neighborhood and one of the hot spots during the LA riots of ‘92. Living in the alley were drug addicts doing crack in dumpsters and women doing men for a fix. The one smart move the boss made was to pay head-crackhead Freddie a small wage to keep an eye on things—security, sort of. Freddie slept in the back of the trucks and washed up in the office bathroom. He was top dog in his world and rarely did anyone mess with him or the trucks. The job gave Freddie a sense of responsibility, though on occasion he’d go on a bender and resurface after a couple of days,

looking and smelling like a vagrant. No questions were asked, nor excuses given. On a move, sometimes I'd catch a whiff from a furniture pad that made me wince ... I could always tell which pads Freddie had used for bedding.

*

The remaining truck in the yard ran on propane gas, and we had to drive way over the other side of town to fill up before we could go to our job. New Dude and I got in. I heard the familiar clicking sound as I turned the ignition key.

"Oh yeah ..." I put my face in my hands "forgot. Will you give me that window winder on your side, Tommy?"

"Window winder?"

"Yeah."

"You mean dis *vise grip*?"

"I mean that vise grip that has doubled as a window winder for the last five years."

"*What!*"

I got out of the truck and went under the engine. I did my business and climbed back in.

Tom K was open mouthed as I fired up.

"What did you do?"

"I dunno. I only drive these tanks. I don't know how to fix 'em. It's a thing called a solenoid. You hit it, apparently. Welcome to the company ... oh yeah. Here's your window winder."

We started to laugh. In fact, he laughed about it all day. Surprisingly, the lady was nice. Trevor was right ... *this time*. We all had a good day.

*

There's a great divide between East and West Coast movers. Those from "back east" really fancy themselves as *the bee's knees, the cat's meow ... the monkey's nuts!*

"You ain't a real mover unless you learned the business in Noo Yorrk."

Perh-lease! A good mover is a good mover, regardless of where and from whom he learns the game; it's definitely some kind of macho thing. Tommy had so obviously learned his English and moving in New York. He adopted their swagger and speech patterns. Originally from Hungary, he came over with a bunch of mates to see what the New World had to offer. Like many folk who come "out here" from the East Coast, he spent most of his time complaining about the place. Our volatile debates concerned his favorite topic.

"LA is full of pretentious nut jobs."

"Well, go back. Go back Tom, if you don't like it here."

"Nah, you need someone who can show you the finer points in moving."

"And that someone would be ... *you?*"

"Fuck-kin' A."

A graduate from the "Ah-fuck it/just do it" school of life, he applied it to his moving. Never one for any fancy skills, just "bust the move and get outta here." Finer points? *Yeah, right!*

Gradually the T Man and I became quite the double act.

T Man's People Skills

The move we did that day highlighted his beef with Los Angeles. I remembered Trevor's parting

shot about the customer: *He's a nize guy.*

... *Hmm.*

The small man who opened the front door was well groomed and manicured.

"Hi. I'm Artie, this is Tommy."

"Good morning. Nice to see you're finally here. You may call me Mr. Cee."

"Yeah, sorry 'bout that, we had to gas up the truck."

LIE. We stopped for a spot of breakfast along the way.

"Well, you're here now. Follow me."

T man and I swapped a look. We took a quick tour of the condo, nothing difficult, all very straightforward. This *Mr. Cee* ran a neat and clean household. nice—for movers, that is. As I went through the paperwork with him, Tom set up the truck. Mr. Cee requested that all questions regarding the move, should come to him via one person—me, and that Tommy was not to address him personally.

I snickered slightly.

"You're serious, right?"

"Quite serious. I only want to speak to one man, and that's you, Artie."

"Oh-kay."

I never thought to ask why. I was stunned at the nature of such a request, like I was back in the Old Country where over-formality is rife.

"Oh, and Artie please, don't use any of the bathrooms except for the one behind the kitchen."

"You mean the one in the servants' quarters?"

"There are no servants, here. What do you—?"

My word play fell on deaf ears. I waved the remark away.

"Don't worry about it. British humor ... 's ok."

As I came down the steps, I chuckled at the image of the customer in a white robe with the initials *JC* on his lapel. As he signed the contract, I noticed a gold ring. Two letters. Beginning with *J* ... ending with *C*. *OH-OH. Whatever next ...?* His monogram on every article of clothing, linen, piece of soap and toilet roll dispenser in the house? I mean, you'd do your shirts and handkerchiefs, but would you do your socks? *AND, why do it in the first place?* I'd love to have found out what was behind all of that. I mean, the neurotic impulse that fed the action. And don't tell me there wasn't one, either, Dear Reader! Tommy's phrase came to mind: pretentious nut job. *Right!* Both Mr. Cee's requests were laughable, but what the hell, he seemed pleasant enough, regardless. It was only a small move; we wouldn't be there, long.

Tommy was seething when I informed him, as if he was being treated like a 2nd class citizen.

"Like ... a servant?" I smiled.

"Yeah. Fok that and fok him. I know what he's up to, *I only want to speak to one man and that's you Artie*, and the reason is—he's a fokin faggot. He fancies a little bit of Artie's "salami." Dat's de reason. Dat's why he only wants to speak to you. *Erh? Herhhh?* I'm gonna fix his shit."

As per usual, Tom got straight to the heart of what he considered *the matter*, in proper East Coast fashion; Noo Yorrk came out large when he got tweaked. I really had no idea what Tommy meant by this. Or what he was capable of. He was 6'2" with a swimmer's build. His brash show belied a sweet nature, but still, everyone's capable of snapping if their pain is triggered. I decided to keep my wits about me and monitor the situation.

Back in the house, Tommy and I rounded up stuff for the deck: dining room chairs, coffee table, light boxes, etc.

“Oh, erh excuse me, Ar-Tie? Did you know there’s a chip on the edge of dis glass?”

I looked around to see Tommy holding a coffee table top. I was right next to the customer. He’d obviously heard. I remembered his request; it was somewhat redundant but ... *here goes*.

“Did you know there’s a chip in the glass, Mr. Cee?”

“Yes, thank you.”

I turned back to my task. It is customary to point out all damages, so we’d not be held responsible, later.

“And Artie? Ar-Tie. We have another one here, on the *other* side. Here! Thank you? Thank you.”

It was Tommy again with the same piece of glass. I turned to Mr. Cee.

“You have another on the other—”

“ANNND ... he’s missing one of dose plastic deals that go under the glass top, Ar-Tie?”

“And he’s m—, you’re missing one of those deals that go under.”

Mr. Cee looked bewildered. I was half-smiling but Tom was deadly F’in serious. That was the T Man’s game: Him talking to me, in front of the customer/me repeating it straight to Mr. Cee. Every knick out of a piece of wood, scratch on furniture, stain on a couch—Tommy was there overly enunciating very-specific damage to me, before the shipper. It was comical, and JC grew weary, but Tommy had an intimidating way about him that the customer was not about to confront. Mr. Cee had set a ride in motion that he could not stop nor get off. I was not about to call a halt to it, either. It was his just reward for being a *pretentious nut job*. Besides, Tom wasn’t being rude to him, exactly. It was Tommy’s way of making a point. His pride had been wounded and was out for revenge: the cut and thrust of warm spirited sarcasm. Only, Tommy was not joking.

The move didn’t take long and after settling up the bill, the customer, JC, seemed to slink away ... in his pressed, monogrammed robe. Of course there was no tip. To me a tip was not that big a deal; we made pretty good money from the company. A little extra at the end of a day was always nice, but not mandatory. However, to a mover from the East Coast, *Not to Tip* is a sin: The Eleventh Commandment. Tommy was fuming.

“You didn’t expect him to tip, did you? Not after the way you treated him.”

“He started it. He drew first blood!”

“*First Blood?* You’re ridiculous.”

“Oh am I, we’ll see about dat. I fixed his shit.”

“What do you mean?”

“Never mind about dat. I fixed him. *Hah!*”

“Whadoyoumean, come on? What did you do ... Rambo. What?”

We were on our way back home in the truck. Tom was slouched down with his feet on the dash, smoking and blowing O rings.

“WHAT?”

“I peed in every one of his bathrooms at the unload and didn’t flush.”

“You didn’t. *Really?*”

Tommy was grinning and nodding. Grinning and nodding.

“Oh man, I can’t believe you did that ... *hah-hah* ... I don’t believe it.”

That was the scene in the cab as we drove back to the yard. Me, lost in thought, shaking my head,

the T Man grinning and nodding ... and blowing smoke. I parked, switched off and let out a long sigh.

“Get out of my truck, you animal.”

Tommy leaned across.

“I was joking, Ar-Tie. Course I didn’t piss in his bathrooms. *I only want to speak to one man and that’s you, Artie.*”

He got out and slammed the door

“*You may call me Mr. Cee. Fokin’ Faggot!*”

Tommy K was shouting at me through a closed window.

He was a strange mix—a tough nut with a big bark, but underneath ... he was mortified that I momentarily believed he’d actually done the deed in Mr. Cee’s bathrooms.

“Dude, you think I’m a philistine. A caveman. How could you think dat?”

“Look, I dunno what you’re up to. One moment you’re Andrew Dice Clay and the next you’re observing correct social behavior like Oscar Wilde.”

“D’you think you’re any different? We’re real people, we’re not phonies ... we wrestle with issues: The way we’d like to behave, and the way we ought to behave. We’re a balance of head and heart. We’re at odds with ourselves ... all my favorite people are.”

“Hmm. Maybe you’re right ... *Animal.*”

“*Faaaaag!*”

Though he had no formal training, he read widely. He talked passionately about art, music, and literature. He enjoyed periods of creativity in which he’d start work on a script, usually based in the middle ages with plenty of military and religious symbolism. He loved epic battle movies and tried to incorporate that classical sweep of vast imagery in his screen play. After a show of sensitive, would come the wild and crazy guy display. His one beer after work often became a twelve pack—hanging out on neighbors’ balconies hurling insults and furniture at the world or chasing friends around the apartment complex with a fire extinguisher. We had some fun times.

Eventually, I tired of the restrictions and petty wranglings with the owner of the company and gave up my (what had become) two day a week gig. I was grateful for a chance to test the water as driver, but now it was time to move on. I changed employers many times over the next few years and finally ended up as a driver/helper at the firm where I met Bird Man. And Bird Man beget Bossman.

Tommy went his own way and we lost contact. Over the years, I heard he’d switched gears and made the transition from a job that hardly suited his imaginative skills to a career as a graphic artist. *Good for you, T Man. I salute you ... and off you ride into a happy sunset.*

T Man II

I got a call one day from a moving bud.

“You heard about Tommy K?”

“No.”

“He’s, uh ... he tried to commit suicide. Cut his throat from ear to ear. Somehow, God knows how he missed the main artery. ...”

I recalled an impression of Tommy. It came out in the drink, at the end of a heavy boozing session

when the energy was down. About nine months after he came to the States he was traveling across country on a bus. His visa had expired; he was illegal. The cops pulled him off and he went to jail for 10 days. He'd palled up with some other big white dudes and only his gruff, bold front got him through his time there. Whether the general experience changed him or something specific, I never found out. Whatever it was shook him to the core. After that he felt like a man on the run, a fugitive, always looking over his shoulder, as if at any moment there'd be someone on his tail.

I was surprised to find out that his suicide attempt had occurred a couple of months earlier. *Wow!* All that time and I never knew. He was recuperating with a friend. I really didn't know what to do. I didn't want to bother him but I couldn't pretend it hadn't happened. I wanted to be there for a friend but wasn't sure he would still consider me such, after all, it had been five years or so. What would I say? What are you supposed to say after an event like that: *Sorry to hear about your 'accident' / Hope you get well soon?* Nah. But I had to do something ...

Eventually, I called. He knew my voice right away.

"Ar-Tie Q, wassup dude?"

"Tommy ... I heard what happened."

"Yeah, well. I'm better now."

I'd been told his voice was a little husky. I listened closely to his speech as if there'd be clues that something tragic had happened ... nothing. Same old, same old. He gave no details and I was not about to push it. So there we were, like back in the old days, as if no time had interrupted our rambunctious carryings-on. Tommy was lucky in the sense that he had a close group of friends from Hungary whom he could descend on in case of emergency. This was his family. Like an errant brother, no matter the occasion, he was always welcome to stay ... until he became a pain, and then they kicked him out. They provided a sanctuary when times were tough. After the "accident" he began taking Prozac; supposedly, it mellowed him out a little. He was getting back on his feet and it was time for him to give his friend a break, move to his own place—a shared house with a bunch of guys. Things went well. His design business showed signs of success; he got a few clients.

During this time, we had some pleasant afternoons, making it a regular date to watch artsy European movies while drinking herbal teas. He still had the piss and vinegar of his moving days, though.

Some of my music was being featured in the soundtrack of a movie and in the opening sequence. OK, it was an independent film with no pay, but it was a start. Credit and possible royalties. Tommy heard some tracks I'd been working on and was inspired. He offered to build me a web site. I couldn't pay much and he was insulted that I offered. I wanted to show my gratitude, but he wouldn't hear of it. He did me proud—I loved his design.

"*Artie! Artie! Artie! The One Man Party! Party! Party!* Come on over dude, got a little somethin' for ya."

He was putting finishing touches to the site. He'd bought the biggest monitor they made, a few years before they came out with the flat panels. A 21" screen. I'd never seen anything that big. He was buzzing, a designer at the easel creating a masterpiece: artieq.com

"Dude, dis is so cool, see how everything is contained within the letter Q."

"Tommy, I can't thank you enough."

He held up his hand.

“Dude, don’t worry. This is a pleasure; I love this site ... tho’ I say it myself. *Hah!*”

I felt guilty that he was giving so generously and I didn’t have the cash to help him out. I knew money was an issue for him.

“Listen Tommy, let me tell you something. What you’ve done is special, not only the design but the act of giving without thought of recompense. You don’t think it’s a big deal, but I do. If you saw this quality in another, you’d recognize it for what it is: special. It’s also a great site. Thank you.”

He’d changed a little—wore a beard, for obvious reasons. Now in his thirties, he was no longer the slim dude of yesteryear. As he worked, I was intrigued to see if I could spot the scarring beneath the hair. Human nature. *Hah!* The crash on the freeway/looky loo syndrome, it reduces all to primeval level.

“Dude, I’ve never said this before. I didn’t really know how to bring it up, but if you ever want to talk about stuff. I’m your man.”

“I appreciate it, dude.”

He knew I was referring to his attempt at suicide, but wouldn’t be drawn. Embarrassment, pride, fear ... who knows what got in the way?

“Wanna beer ...?”

*

That was it—right there, right then—the slippery slope back down. One beer, six beers, twelve beers ... what was I gonna say: *Dude, are you sure you should be drinking?* It was one of the few pleasures left. Was I to try and deny him that? You can’t save people from themselves. I remembered a phrase of his from old, “Dude, you goin down!”

You ain’t gonna make it Tom, are you?

*

“Sure ... I’ll take a beer.”

I felt hollowed out, as if someone had taken an ice cream scoop to my insides, but I kept a straight face to my friend. It was the least I could do ... but what was the most?

You can’t save people ... *yeah, yeah, yeah!*

The booze canceled out the effect of the medication. Or, heightened its effects. I think. I must admit I’m not sure. I’m a stranger to the pharmaceutical world. He got irritated easily and warred with his roommates. He began worrying about his legality, believing it to be the reason he couldn’t take his career to the next level. The drinking got worse and he was back to a twelve pack and then some, at a setting. He couldn’t stand the guys in the house anymore, so he moved. Actually, come to think of it, more like he’d become a royal pain and was asked to leave, and got a small place on his own. Of course, I offered my professional services since his transition to a desk job was brought about by the onset of a bad back. He didn’t have much stuff. It was like the old days.

“Hey, dude. If you ever need your old job back ... on the trucks. I’ll put in a word for ya.”

I gave him the thumbs up; he gave me the finger. T Man II was in no shape for anything physical. Gone was the animated nimble bounce to his stride, replaced by the rolling gait of an older man carrying a lot more weight. His face was round with little sign of the prominent full jaw that characterized the youthful, larger than life Tommy. His hair was thinning. He was thirty five and looking twenty years older than the man I’d known ten years earlier.

I visited him a couple of times at his new place. It was a minimally furnished single; it had that industrial type carpet, gray and basic. I liked it, though.

He was re-tweaking something on the site and invited me over. It was late, and he was drunk and loud. We were reliving some glorious musical memories. The Pistols. I love that album, the only real punk record in my mind. We were singing along, mesmerized by the Q on the massive screen.

“You’ll always find me ... out to lunch ... and I don’t like ya! We’re so pretty, oh so pretty ...”

It was midnight and instead of tapering off, he cranked the volume. The windows were open and next door’s building was right there—Apartment City. Tommy had been segueing into classical, recently, but the music that night reflected his mood.

“Can you turn it down, some of us are trying to sleep.”

The neighbor was shouting from across the way.

“Hey Tommy, maybe we should cool it with the volume, eh?”

“Nah, don’t worry ‘bout it dude.”

It was now 12:30 a.m. and *Straight Outta Compton* was blasting @ volume 10. The little old lady below, began hammering on the ceiling. I began to get uncomfortable.

“Fuck dis shit, it’s my house.”

He was trying to concentrate on the screen but was way distracted.

“Turn the music down, turn it down!” The lady yelled out the window.

*

He called me the next day.

“Man, I’m sorry about last night. I really must apologize.”

“Yo Tommy, I gotta tell ya. You scared me.”

He’d been shrieking at a little old lady who complained of the noise (and rightly so). He’d said some terrible things to her. Awful. Probably frightened her to death. I’d never seen him quite so belligerent, so brutal. This was another man, and not my friend.

“Forget about me dude, you should make your peace with the lady downstairs. You were out of control.”

He’d already done so.

*

The movie was not only awful, it was God Awful. I’d not seen it in advance and that was a big mistake; then again, no-one got to see it till the night of the premier. It should not have been shown then, either. Or *ever*, in fact. The print should have gone from the Lab straight to the trash. I was so embarrassed. I’d talked 40 friends into coming to a theater on Wilshire Boulevard. To watch shit—*Shit, with my music in!*

Tommy K wasn’t there that night. He didn’t like to go out much anymore. The movie premier was the night of Tommy’s second suicide attempt—this time he hung himself.

T Man, if you feel so bad, let no-one stand in your way.

I had a strange image of him. It was as if in death, he was up on high, scolding my decision, wagging a finger: *Dude, how could you let your music be in dis piece of trash!*

And he’d have been right.

Analysis: Tommy was a bright spark who blazed his own trail. It was not until I started writing that I rediscovered bits of hidden feeling and incident that connected us. I remembered his spirit: The energy and unwavering support, the heated debates and comic relief.

I know the T Man had a tough start in life: One, full of struggle that persisted in adulthood. His suicide and 1st attempt are indication of huge early pain. He sought refuge in drink and medication.

He had some good friends, but essentially felt lonely and alone. The measure of a person, I think, is not how they do when the world is smiling, but what happens when the chips are down. Even though he had little at the end, he was a big hearted man with what he had to give. Thanks for everything, Tommy.

Regarding Rock n Roll Mike, his childhood was bleak. Without a stable parental environment, his needs for security, emotional connectedness and love seem to have been largely absent. He barely took care of himself as a man, as did those in charge of his early life. He lived alone in that crawlspace like a forgotten, neglected child. When I met him, he was looking for the guidance and support he'd never received as a child. He was a leaf floating in the wind, hither and thither, wherever the ebb and flow of life blew him.

Tommy was a type B mover and had he persevered, his creative nature would have made a success of his design company and beyond, I'm sure. Mike was a B as well, with a smattering of the C group, tho' without the criminal intent. Too gentle a soul for the harsh realities of life. I wonder if he escaped the entrapment of the homeless/shopping-cart lifestyle and made it into eighties-cover band glory? I really hope so.

CHAPTER 10

Conclusions ... *What Conclusions!*

The persistent flapping of the patio table umbrella has ceased; the Santa Anas are no longer whipping up the water in the pool. It's 4 a.m. and all is now calm: outside and inside. The wine, the view, the memory of Tommy ... *Dude, how could you let your music be in dis piece of trash? Hah*—Humor. If anything can take the edge off, a touch of whimsy can. Undoubtedly, a glass or two of red helps, as well.

Over the last ten years, things have really changed for me. Right up until say, '95, I'd only ever been focused on creating music. It was the most important thing in my life. It edged out everything: relationships, career ... At the end of *Rage & Silence*, my creative life took a divergent path. Yes, Dear Reader, time to fess up—I am the ex-songwriting partner of Flamenco Boy; I felt his story was better told without me in the musical picture. I must add that I would have bailed a lot sooner had the music not been the glue that held us together ... I kept hoping it would pull us through. *Yeah, right.*

My songs were not reaping a commercial success; I'd been at it far too long and simply *ran out of steam*. So, I turned away. Somehow, I fell into a theater production, and one play referred another and so on. I never considered myself a professional, though the producers seemed to like my performances. I felt like a phony in front of other actors, as if someone would stand up at the back and cry: *He's not a real actor. He's no thespian!* And they would have been right. I was not trained. I believed I could learn by doing, rather than studying at school. For acting? *Per-lease*. You're either a show off or you're not. I felt self conscious at rehearsals but live performance is a very different animal. I was free to be exactly what I wanted and reveled in the experience. After all, I was a performer; the years of playing live music had sharpened those skills. I learned my lines at home, made them “my own,” then had fun playing on stage.

“I love your work, Artie.”

No. Work is at home—memorizing text. Being on stage is fun, not work.

It was a wonderfully stimulating phase of my life. As the productions rolled on, I realized that I was digging deep into emotions to use as ammunition for performances. One song I was given to sing was about saying good-bye to my girlfriend in the play. To gain some depth, I projected feelings I had for my Mother into the song. “The girlfriend,” myself, director, and music director were the only people at rehearsal. I was not sure exactly how it would come out. By the second verse I was hit by a wave of emotion and don't know how, but came to sobbing in the arms of director, Philip Littell.

“I don't know how you got to what you're experiencing, but this is the greatest compliment you can pay our song.”

I was saying good-bye to my folks and the feeling overtook me. Plus the fact that Philip and Eliot

Douglass wrote beautiful songs together. I don't care much for the genre of musicals, but theirs was out of the genre. It was simply classic—a piano and a voice—timeless. So, in this raw condition I performed, four nights a week for eight weeks and sang that song. It affected me deeply every time. By the end of the play I was tapping into a whole new world of feeling. I met a woman as the play wrapped (look at me, with the thespian terms!) and we had a three month affair together.

At last, a woman from the same planet as me. Eminently sensible but with an eccentric streak.

I had finally fallen in love. Time for a mature relationship, I thought; it never occurred to me that she didn't feel the same. Well, she got bored and dumped me, but I was still connected. And when tragic things happen in life, we humans tend to look for logic, sense ... reasons why. Maybe I was a playful diversion? Could she have been attracted to the character in the play she saw night after night and not the "real me?" Perhaps I didn't earn enough money? Who knows? Who cares? Well, I, very obviously, did.

I started evaluating myself in my highly critical and wounded state. At least with a theater production, a penniless male performer can create an alternative forum on which to be assessed by the opposite sex. I was an artiste who cared naught for possessions, but the play was now over and Forties were on the horizon. I was realizing how most of the female population would view me—an illegal, bohemian mover.

I've come to America to conquer the world and look at me now, Ma—Christ, what a loser! If I could just get back to the happy-go-lucky fellow I'd been before ... but he was gone. There was no going back, no snapping out of this one. What if the happy-go-lucky fellow didn't really exist anyway? What if he'd been distracted all those years—distracted from feeling? What if I, too, was another Mister 'Blivious? Yikes! After all, it was not the music, but the "process of creating" that was my rush—music, theater, and now, writing. Perhaps it all kept me deflected ... deflected from having to feel.

I have always lived in my head but the experience in theater taught me to react more in the body—instinctively, rather than trying to figure things through (directing myself, as I always had done). When one is picked-on as a kid, one tends to retreat into the head: *I'll show them, they don't understand; I belong to the stars*, was my mantra from childhood. As Research observed, the act of separating.

I learned to open up and had now fallen apart. I completely lost my way. I teared up in public for no apparent reason. I was sobbing in the shower stall instead of washing off the grime of life. I went for midnight runs, then took an ice cold bath. After ten hour work days I'd engage in marathon work-out sessions and then run the five miles to my ex-girlfriend's house, so I could watch her turn out the bedroom light, just to be—

What? Close to her again. I'm stalking my ex. Jesus! Wait a minute that's not me, I'm not a stalker, I'm not the bad guy ... I think. What am I doing?

I was behaving like a neurotic teenager, but twenty years further on. I was a lunatic. Five minutes without her, felt like five fuckin days!

This is crazy. What is happening to me ...?

I was exhausted. I tried reasoning with myself. At that time I did not fully appreciate the benefits of a Good Guy/Mirror Man dialogue. I just had to plain ol' talk to myself.

If I sincerely want her to be happy, and her happiness does not include me, I must bow out.

Seemed to make sense. I calmed down. A bit. She had said good-bye and I was entangled.

She is gone and I must accept it, otherwise I'll turn into someone, some "thing" I despise.

I retreated for the next four months. All I did was rent videos. I was all cried out and felt nothing. I moved furniture and watched movies. There were days when all I did was sit in the dark with the blinds drawn, keeping out daylight, so I could lose myself in film. I was empty. I watched anything and everything. In time, I went to the other extreme. I laughed and cried hysterically and started to feel, but the road back to "normalcy" (or should that be "defended control ...?") was a long haul.

Music came knocking one day, and with it the opportunity of other creative endeavors. Tommy K re-entered my life. I built a beautiful recording studio with a business partner, released dance tracks, embarked in the voice over world, and became an uncle twice over. I had a companionable two year relationship with a lovely woman. I was engaging in life, again. Slowly. Feelings that had been deeply buried for many years, were now bubbling just below the surface, within arms reach. The theater experience, the fall out that ensued, my reaction to Bossman and my sister were all clear evidence of this.

Seventeen years ago I arrived in LA, in the few short months that the Jacaranda trees are in their glorious purple bloom. Unlike anything I'd seen before, the daytime sun was dazzling; I was seeing Los Angeles through a new born baby's eyes. It was as if a hand from above had lifted the blinders off and left me in a blinking daze, and I loved it all—from the majestic sweep of the Santa Monica/PCH Coastline to the seedy and tacky of Hollywood, and everything in between. I'd come from a place where I felt creatively and emotionally constrained to feeling like anything was possible. Imagination, or rather the lack of it, is the only thing that holds any of us back. I am thankful for the chance to stay in this wonderful city that is open to new possibilities. A city that gave me a second chance.

Though I love LA, it seems it can be a terribly alienating place for some (especially single folk) and my perverse nature would half-like to believe it's something in the air, something so rarefied that only a select group are allowed to drink from the cup, and the rest of us get sick when attempting to sip it down.

Back to the real world, Artie, please!

Well, of course I don't really believe that. There are major reasons why people lose their way here (or anywhere really), but that is for another time. Suffice to say that some fall through the cracks and are not always caught by the safety net of society's compassion. They are doomed to walk the earth, or choose to—several of them are in this book. As I said earlier, most of their wacky behavior was a frantic yearning for attention; but what now is clear, that no amount they received as adults ever seemed to be enough to placate the wounded child of yesteryear. At best, it (attention) was merely a distraction from their pain.

Some would say *suck it up and move on*. Oh-kay, but it's presence is still there. Is this then, the only solution to all our pain ... to deflect—with therapy, medication, drugs, drink, love, life, family, religion, whatever ...? There are those (Research Man) who believe that revisiting the scene of the crime/the source of "old" pain, and reliving and feeling it (as was not done/could not be done in the early years) is the only real way out ... maybe I'll try it, one day.

No matter the mileage I gained at the expense of my moving brothers (I did not spare myself, by the way; certainly my behavior at times was up there with the wackiest of the C types), I am grateful to them and moving itself—for at least once, The Boys/Ma Boys literally saved my life,

and the business afforded me an opportunity to stay and pursue artistic and personal dreams. I've had ups and downs and made it so far, with help from myself, close friends, Mum and Dad, and ... detractors. Yes, them too. Along with Cargo Pants Man, they provided me with a little extra oomph, an added F-U bonus, to prove them unsound in judgment.

Fleeing a nation of Dream Stealers was the reason I came to America, and here I am, 17 years and 6,000 miles later, once again doing battle. Maybe, Research is right: recreating my past in the present. I used to feel the Dream Stealers were only to be found in the old country, but I was wrong, wrong, wrong. They're everywhere. They're not solely a product of any one country but of a disenfranchised human spirit. Like a crushed seed that has not been nurtured, their aim is to make sure others do not dare to dream, do not reach for the stars ... because they just may get left behind. So be vigilant, Dear Reader. Beware.

Suddenly, I'm batting back the light. *Uh. Five o'clock—Ding! The outside lighting.* From darkness to stark bright. As if to illuminate the thought in my head and be witness to a pledge:

To the old man that I'll be at the end of the day, I owe him my very best to stay the course. Even if immediate goals are not forthcoming, something bigger will manifest itself. And by bigger, I mean *better*. I'll pursue my dreams all right, even if I have to fight all the Bossmans of this world. I just need stamina for the long haul ...

Super Ant's Theme

Shall I forge my own way, regardless of life's insecurities
and subtle pressures that others bring to bear?

Will I be strong enough to meet their disapproval—

A Cancer in the Unmet Dreams of Others.

And more, do I press onward when there is no guarantee of outcome?

I cannot be 100%, but I know one thing—I'm not afraid of failure.

My fear is one of not trying.

I may be many things but I shall not end up a *coulda/woulda/shoulda*.

Brave words ... I hear people say

but will it be enough that I tried, gave it my best

and still fell short of the mark, at the end of my days?

If I don't try, I'll never know.

The journey of a lifetime begins with the first step, some folk say.

And I say that, too.

I am an Ant—Super Ant, out to climb “my Everest.”

Don't look at the big picture;

just take it easy, little by little, and things will fall ...

and I'll watch that mountain melt away.

- Artie Q

aka Artie Q MD/Techno Man/The World's Least Spiritual Human Being/A Good Guy/Chelsea Boy/Super Ant/Mirror Man

THE END

Local Moving—Tips On Choosing/Not Choosing A Mover

Choosing a moving company can be a minefield. Here are some rules of thumb when making your decision:

1. If you don't have a mover in mind, try and get a referral from a friend. Ask for exactly the same people on the crew. A company may have a good reputation, but remember: A move is only as good as the men working the job. Padding of crews (Good Guys mixed with those less capable) goes on when there is a downpour of work. Where's the benefit in having a great moving company field a team of C type Whackos because they've run out of Good Guys?
2. Get a selection of written estimates/quotes from companies. This may help you get the feel of their customer service. The lowest priced estimate may not be the best quality move, though. If you can, pick a moving company where the estimator is going to be on the crew of a select core group. This is a good sign. Usually he is the owner—a relatively small operation—and won't BS you to get the job. He also wants the repeat/referral business of good customers. This type of company will be cheery, personable and experienced. Don't call me if you find one that isn't. There may be exceptions ... though I haven't come across any.
3. Beware the mover who wears a weight belt. He's wearing an invisible sign that says *I don't pay enough attention to my own well being to lift correctly ... so I'll probably care even less about your furniture.* If you get the chance, suggest he starts a good nutritional supplement, ASAP; most likely, he's existing on a diet of burgers, fries and sodas.
4. Be concerned if the guys are body builder types. They have little stamina for the long haul and are often busy making protein shakes. (In order not to lose bulk.) They are vain and like to admire shaved body parts. A lot, in fact. In which case they may not be attending to your possessions whilst flexing.
5. Never use a company that only has an electronic lift gate on the truck, and not a ramp. These guys are not serious about the moving business. It is a fact that a truck without a ramp will take longer to load and unload than a truck that has one. No ramp = More money. You choose. Plus, accidents are more likely to happen—stepping off a lift gate as opposed to coming down a ramp.
6. Anyone would be horrified at the image of a decrepit and beat up van that arrives on Moving Day. Don't panic, necessarily. Though the look bodes ill, it could be a rough and ready kind of operation. The issue that you should address in your choice of mover, is experience. The smaller set ups don't always have the capital for a clean, shiny truck. All you need to know is, does he know what he's doing?
7. When discussing the crew: If a company uses the term “good workers”—*put down the phone and head for the hills!* Ignorant, yet hard working people with the best intentions are the cause of many a moving mishap. You need to hear the term “good movers.”
8. Don't pick a company on the strength of a name alone. Names can be misleading. Some claim to be on time ... so what? What if they are prompt but just so happen to destroy everything in the house? Where's the upside in that?

Some titles lead you to believe they take extra care of your stuff: *We Pad Everything. (Especially The Bill!* <—This, they don't tell you.)

Careful of businesses declaring, though they suffer from a lack of food and are of a studious nature, they are therefore, decent and hard working. Guess what? *THEY'RE LYING*. In general, the most calamitous of moving nightmares concern these companies. They don't care that you've just had the worst experience in your life and won't refer them, they figure there's always another uninformed sucker out there—desperate for a mover—who'll take a chance on them, especially when the name alone is responsible for the volume of business.

Watch out for those advertising in the *Yellow Pages* who insist on prefacing their name with a triple or quadruple "A" i.e. AAA A Very Good Moving Co. They're doing this to be listed first. They know there's a small percentage of customers who will call the first name they come across. Make sure you're not among this group.

9. Don't fall for a moving company based on a truck parked on a bridge over the freeway (cheaply) advertising their company. A tacky move. It's the same tactic as #7—to get their name (and logo) in the public's consciousness.

10. Beware of hidden charges. Some companies will not inform you of Double Drive Time (DDT) or Station to Station Fees (over the phone, or obscurely and confusingly referenced in an estimate). It is not mentioned for fear of scaring off the customer ... but will direct the driver to slip it in (*hopefully*) unnoticed—possibly with other *sundry* charges—on the bill at the end of the job. The PUC allows companies to make a DDT charge as a way of recouping some gas money if they have to drive a ways to/from your home.

Regardless of whether you receive an estimate, it is a good idea to be clear on price at the start of the move, not the end. This way you can straighten out any questions—monetary or otherwise—before they arise. The last thing you'll feel like doing is haggling over the bill at the close of an exhausting day.

I was on a job where the police were called in at the end because of a payment dispute. Regardless of how fair they determined the cost of the move to be, they came down in favor of the movers. We had completed our side of the bargain and delivered all furniture.

11. Damages: Somewhat redundant to the point of choosing a mover, but pertinent as to whether you care to refer the company, or even re-hire when you move again. Even a Great Mover can slip up—he's human, after all.

The cost of a move comes with very basic insurance coverage (60 cents per pound per article) and is most effective when an item is heavy and cheap-ish. If it is irreplaceable and light, extra insurance should be purchased from the mover. Better still, a good homeowner's policy. When there is an accident, the company will try and repair the piece first. If it is damaged beyond repair, depending on the insurance you have chosen or his good nature and reputation, he'll spring for the cash, or know where he can get a good deal on a new or "pre-owned" item.

During the move there are many factors that deflect attention, and damages may only be noticed after the movers have gone. You, as the customer, have to decide where you want to go with this. If you want action on behalf of the mover, inform them immediately, otherwise the responsibility of damage becomes difficult to prove as time elapses. Once you've contacted them, don't harass but do keep on the ball. Sometimes a company will not jump on it right away because of the drop-off rate in customer complaints. I.E. decent folk who deem it not worth their while to keep calling, with little response. When the "time and hassle" quotient on the customer's part does not equal the end result, the matter may soon be dropped, thus the company is ahead of the game. If you want to

pursue your claim and the company hasn't returned your many phone calls, inform the PUC. Or there's the small claims court scenario. I have to say, *this* is a last resort, and most of the incidents that I've been aware of (that ended up in court) were because the customer had defaulted on payment. Unfortunately, there are members of the public who hear the word "insurance" and go *hog wild* ... trying to get the mover to spring for all kinds of nonsense. As I have said, *customers are another ball game and deserve their own book*.

12. If you are at your wits end trying to find a mover—ask a real estate agent or at storage facilities. Sometimes they refer moving companies. I knew a Realtor that actively promoted a good company to good clients. The mover always did a good job because of the referral factor and gave the agent a little "thank you" from time to time.

14. There is no thirteen—bad luck, and we don't want that on moving day. Do we?