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Desperate Horseflies

Let the horsefly fly, eh?

Didn't happen that way, but that's what was being said at the time because horseflies have rights. Let them mess with horseflies. Say nothing. Next thing you know, they're messing with you. You think horseflies lost their rights when they decided to become horseflies? Guess again, pal. All living things have a right to live under the new constitution. There are exceptions, sure, but if you kill something without the right permit, shame on you. Unless the death has some overriding purpose, with all permits in order, everything has a right to live, if it had parents.

Under the new constitution, I'm speaking about. Some say it's a call of the reverence for life crowd's bluff, but I don't necessarily agree. Technically, I suppose, I'm part of that crowd. I know that, among us, we agree about very little, especially when it comes to setting limits on our reverence, lest we trod on someone else's.

You didn't hear about this?

Under the new constitution, you can get a permit to kill all manner of living things, including horseflies, but the permits are expensive, and there's a line. Mostly responsible is this new breed of thirty somethings, hanging out at the stables, not happy unless their lives are hopelessly bound up in chaos, alienation, betrayal and confusion. Turns out that they are the ones most affected. Someone, not me, said that their thirty something lives are a soap opera on steroids.

Let the horsefly fly, eh?

Wait in line down there for a permit sometime, see how that goes, before you go committing to letting the horsefly fly. Should the horseflies be able to go where they want? Become what they want in their horsefly lives? My

own personal Moral Compass, my assigned conscience, under the new constitution, is a person whose name I'm not allowed to say. He's my personal life guide, available Tuesdays, two to four. Shame on me, if I fail to report.

The check in usually goes like this:

"You still working?"

"Oh, yeah."

"Stay clean."

"Gotcha."

One click and I'm clean for another week. Understand. I'm not a criminal or anything. I got a post card from the MMCP, the Mandatory Moral Compass Program. Had to do with my low test scores in school. I figured it was like jury duty. Turns out, the only time I ever really needed a Moral Compass was the day I murdered the horsefly without a permit, which was also the day that I didn't get through to my MC. If you don't get through, by the way, you're supposed to keep trying. I put the phone on redial, lit one up, sat back to wait.

Turns out, there's some kind of a test of the system, which really wasn't fair because I wasn't notified, and neither was my MC. How they were able to translate horsefly moods and activities into multimedia events I'm not sure. As I understand it, there's a process that involves sedating the horsefly and wiring it up with micro-circuitry and all that. How a particular fly is selected from among the many available I don't know. How the fly is isolated from its fellow flies to audition for these experiments, I cannot guess.

Apparently, the selected flies are equipped with a number of micro devices, including head and belly mounted micro 180 degree 'Super-Swivel' 3D color cameras, sound recording devices and microchip hook-ups capable of monitoring various components of the fly's psychological and physical status at any given time, sending the data by wireless to receiving stations at the Office of New Constitution Implementation (NCI), who will say only that the flies have been sent to engage selected citizens as part of a test of a secret anti-terrorist monitoring system.

Our call came in a little before five. Short and sweet.

Large horseflies harassing guests in the great entrance hall of Wisteria Manor. Swatters only, please.

See anything in there about letting the horsefly fly? Anything about considering measures short of swatting, it being generally understood that swatters kill? See any mention of a permit?

So, there we go, the aces from Maintenance, up to the great alabaster hall on the hill. Aunt Margaret grabs two big swatters, takes the lead, I follow in close order. We're on our way to the crowning jewel of this venue, the great Wisteria Manor House and Grounds, a magnificently domed grand ballroom in the Hollywood Hills, rendered in the style of the Sistine Chapel by the press agent of a young starlet famous for her scrapes with the law. We take the southwestern entrance per the floor plan, where great rows of windows line the entire south wall, 'pimping the Vatican layout big time', according to press reports.

This is our turf.

When Uncle Luke was alive, we were the three musketeers. Now, it's just Aunt Margaret and me. By the time we arrive, ladders are already in place, left by the painters. Scaffolding as well. No mention of permits. The thirty-something contractor in charge of the redecoration is more interested in hitting on the comely young receptionist than in dealing with us, so, we trudge straight through, with nary a whisper about letting the horsefly fly.

That little act of forbearance, letting them fly, as it were, is that intended to relieve somehow the desperation in their erratic horsefly lives? I said to Aunt Margaret, talking very, very loudly, and at close range, "Hey, they're stupid little bugs. They don't know the difference."

"But we do," she said, shouting back. "It defines what we are."

Imagine. Being defined by the fact of your living in the filth around stables? Congregating with your fellow creatures around piles of horse shit? Well, this new breed with their new creed has the answer: 'Let 'em fly. These thirty somethings, who dream up these new rules, still mostly hormonal in their motivations and reactions, who would indulge in any deception to get what they wanted, fill their own stables to the brim, if they had stables, with piles of fake emotion, piles of convenient denial, piles of petty selfishness, until the horseflies themselves would do just about anything to escape; aren't they the true source of desperation around here?

Any workers who might have been harassed by the flies are long gone, needless to say. No one around to check with anyway, because this is, after all, a secret test. Nobody even willing to get involved with the horseflies, except Auntie Maggie and me. She pulls spectacular green curtains aside, revealing the magnificent gold framed windows and breathtaking view of the south gardens, the vineyards and the great Pacific Ocean. "So-called 'stable flies' and 'horseflies'," she says, "are generally larger than common houseflies. If there is a more vexatious and annoying creature on the face of this earth, a creature less deserving, I don't know what it would be."

Aunt Maggie often spoke to Uncle Luke in this fashion, as a kind of prelude to the extermination funk he worked up in order to kill indiscriminately. She used to climb, but hasn't for a while now. When Uncle Luke was alive, he did most of the climbing. She climbed occasionally. When he died, I started climbing. Maggie preferred it that way. You maintain these places, somebody has to climb,

I kept the swatter out of sight in my left hand as I'd seen Uncle Luke do. If the flies saw the swatter, they were apt to scatter. "Don't think they don't know what it is," Uncle Luke used to say.

Aunt Maggie was keeping me posted on the horsefly's ever shifting position, above and to my right. The light was good. I was moving slowly, making sure of my footing. I could hear the buzzing up there as the flies dashed back and forth against the top of the glass, noisy little sideways skaters, looking for a way out. Below, Aunt Margaret continued to call out the closest fly's position as I edged upward rung by rung, clutching the swatter. The horseflies, sensing the danger, began to flit about more intensely, managing to keep just out of reach. The nearest fly sensed me closing in. He began to thrash desperately against the glass, more violently and vigorously terrorized than before. "These horseflies have a healthy sense of self-preservation," I screamed down.

Aunt Margaret, deaf as a stone, smiled and nodded.

I'd measured the distance, extending my arm, leaning out from the ladder in the direction of the closest horsefly, coming up a tantalizing three or four inches short, which might just as easily have been a mile, since leaning out any further was bordering on foolhardy. Still, Margaret urged me to stretch. "Reach for it, Reg," she cried out. "Reach for it."

Now, I stretched out as far as I could. Standing on one leg, hanging onto the edge of the ladder with one hand, I reached into space, getting the edge of the swatter very close to the area where the closest fly was surging back and forth across the glass. Now, the little beggar was taunting me, dancing just beyond my reach, and Aunt Margaret's voice grew huskier, more intense, as she urged me on. "Get him, Reg, get him," she called out.

Now, the horse fly was buzzing and dancing more and more erratically, drifting toward the zone that would put him in my sights.

"Reach," Aunt Margaret called out.

Reach I did, up and out as high as I could, stretching my arm as far as it would stretch. When I managed to look up, there he was, just above me, sweeping the glass, back and forth like a bug on an invisible string. Moving up and down, back and forth, he was trying desperately to get beyond the glass and fly away, off into the blue. The ladder was shaking as I reached. Margaret's cell phone went off below, that crazy ring tone, the Flight of the Bumblebee, on the extra loud setting. That might've distracted me normally, but I was in my killing mode, and focused. He danced tantalizingly close, ever closer. Now, ---I paused to savor it. He was within reach. My heart was beating fast. All that was stopping me from swatting the little son of a bitch was my reverence for life.

Asinine foolishness?

Maybe, but my spine was tingling all the same. My toes were curling up against the aluminum rung. A horsefly was inside my kill zone. Other horseflies, desperate for sustenance, yearning to be free, may've drifted off to other parts of the estate, but this one was mine. In those last few seconds, I felt a joy I'd never known before, the joy of the kill, even if it was only a bug. As quick as this hunter's mood came over me, that fast did it vanish.

As will happen, Nature allowed for an epiphany, letting me see the wretched horsefly for what he was, a complex creature of God, a terrified little dipteran trying desperately to fly to the blue sky that lay just beyond the unyielding pane of glass. Like any of us, he wanted to see tomorrow.

Now, my arm drew back. I gripped the ladder with my loose left hand. I let go of all merciful thoughts. The horsefly was desperately looking for that elusive hole in the glass when I blasted him. If I went just a little higher during the coup d' grace than was prudent, just a little farther out, it was because the hunter's joy had overtaken me, made me temporarily one with my hunter side.

The fly was dead.

His guts were splashed on the glass. The last thing I saw was his little body dropping toward the floor, just as the ladder tipped. I was not far behind him, going ass over appetite, as they say, into the middle of the air. I called out, "Timber," as I fell.

"New directions," Aunt Margaret had said, clicking her cell phone shut. Gripped by my killing lust, I'd shunted the message to hold in my brain. "They've decided to let the horseflies fly, set them free." I tried to call 'too late' but the words caught in my throat. I was down. Rather severely shaken, I might add. Lacerations. A broken arm. As I was telling my MC Tuesday: "God knows, I might have been killed, if dear Aunt Margaret hadn't broken my fall, rest her soul."
