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LAZY INSANITY

Zeke had always been an odd guy. He was an odd boy who grew into an odd teenager and was destined to become an even odder adult. He used to blame it on his pinky finger, or really, his missing one. When he was ten, his mother Diana asked him to cut up the celery for his father's salad. She gave him a knife big enough to see his reflection. As he studied himself and the abundance of freckles on his nose, his pinky rolled off the counter while the celery stalk remained intact.

So since that unfortunate day, he blamed any problems on that missing member. "It put me off balance," he'd say, pointing to his squash-shaped head. It only proved worthwhile for grossing out younger kids in the recess yard, but that got old soon. It did, however, destroy his lifelong dream of becoming an Air Force pilot.

"Air Force pilots have *all* their digits," his father said, shooting him in the heart one day over a dinner of beef stew.

"They don't have to," Zeke said, quiet enough so his parents had to read his lips to understand.

“Nine won’t cut it. Never will. The training is rigorous and you have to be able to grasp things with both hands. Not just left, not just right. Both!”

This immediately turned Zeke’s life upside down. He stared at the stub that remained from his one glorious pinky and realized that if he never made that salad for his father, a different and more pleasant story would be told.

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His father Jack wore stupid polka dot bowties that squeezed his neck and made his tiny bald head look like an eraser. He liked reading *USA Today* and other newspapers that required third grade educations. He liked game shows, soap operas, calculators, and people with all ten fingers. He regarded Zeke as a mutant, and frown lines appeared whenever he spoke of the son with only nine digits. He used to be an Air Force Pilot himself, but after having Zeke, he became a CPA who punched numbers into calculators all day. When his company upgraded to computers, he found it too complex and worried he’d be replaced, so he freaked out and shot himself in the face. He only hit his ear. This happened a year after Zeke’s accident and was also the year that Zeke declared himself to be crazy.

Zeke decided this in a fluorescent-lighted hospital while waiting to hear about his father’s condition. His mother Diana was on her tenth cup of coffee. She had taken out a sweetener from the kangaroo pouch of her waitress uniform and added in the whole packet. She was crying because Jack might be paralyzed. Zeke thought that was pathetic. She was large enough to need two seats on an airplane and had freckles that covered most of her skin. She was proud of serving eggs every morning without ever calling in sick, her greatest and only accomplishment. She also read every female and travel magazine out there, imagining she was a better person who also lived in a better place. At this moment, she swore to devote all her energy to Jack and his recovery.

Zeke hated all the damn attention his father was receiving, so he took that fresh cup of coffee out of Diana's fat fingers and threw it in her face. She screamed as scalding coffee streamed down her throbbing cheeks. That was when Zeke discovered how to wrap people around his finger, and he loved that metaphor because of its irony. No one ever messed with crazy people for fear of setting them off.

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Today Zeke was meeting his friend Gibson at a diner. They had gone to school together as kids, but now Gibson had started college and seemed to have less time available. Zeke had finished his twelfth cigarette, spun it through the air like a plane going down in flames, and crashed it into the ashtray amongst all the other casualties of dead cigarettes. He lit another one instantly. Gibson was not amused.

"What are you doing, man?" Gibson asked, with a puzzled look that often resembled shame.

"What are *you* doing, man?" Zeke replied, the cigarette flapping between his lips.

A waitress waddled over to their booth to refill their coffee. She was young and about forty-five pounds overweight.

"Just half for me, Mindy," Zeke said, flicking at the gold nametag prominently displayed on one of her large breasts. "This shit's not even good." He stared into her wide blue eyes until she became embarrassed and sauntered away. "I like her," he said to Gibson, who had already reached into his pocket to pay for lunch. "What are you doing?"

"Paying for lunch."

"We're not done with lunch, my friend. We've only just begun."

"I have class, Zeke."

“You have a disposition for authoritative control. A need to be told what to do at all times. It will be your downfall. Who’s to say you have class now? Your teacher? Who are they to regulate your time?”

“How are you taking advantage of all this extra time on your hands since we graduated?” Gibson asked, rolling his eyes and shaking his perfectly shaped head. Zeke hated him for not having an out-of-shaped head like his own lumpy one. His philosophy was that everyone who is anyone should have an out-of-shape head, or something noticeably wrong because it builds character.

“I’ll tell you what I’m up to, jackass. I was going to buy postcards from other countries and mail them to people I haven’t talked to in a while pretending that I visited those places.”

“Why Zeke?”

“Of course I have to do research on all the places so I don’t look like a fraud. I was thinking Moscow, Taipei, Stockholm, and maybe Tijuana.”

“What’s the point of this?”

“The point is that traveling to all of those places is gonna take a very long time while the outcome of sending these postcards would be exactly the same if I never set foot on a plane. I’m creating an illusion. I’m an illusionist, no?”

Gibson threw a twenty on the table and slid away without even responding to Zeke’s question. This pissed Zeke off greatly and caused him to have the most terrible vision. He imagined Gibson stepping out of the diner, lighting a cigarette and thinking he was so brilliant, when a Toyota Corolla, screeching from out of nowhere, would hit him head-on and drive away leaving him dead on the street. This would cause his perfectly shaped head to be full of bumps and scars. With that thought, Zeke found himself smiling, and when Mindy the waitress shuffled over to pick up the check, he’d pick her up, too.

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Mindy sure was special. She liked ice cream and old quad rollerskates, not rollerblades. She loved watching the Olympics, but what he remembered best about her was that she squealed like a humpback whale in bed. That would come later.

Zeke picked her up without even trying. She was that desperate. Her shift had ended and the two of them managed to fit into her Geo Prism to drive to his house. The hard part would be getting past his parents, especially his mother.

Luckily his mother had left for her shift, and Jack was easy. After the accident, Zeke's father had become completely deaf, and Zeke never bothered to learn sign language so they rarely communicated. Jack lived off his pension and watched game shows all day on their closed-captioned television. He also always carried a pen and paper around his neck.

The Price Is Right was on when Zeke walked in with Mindy. His father scribbled on his notepad and then passed him a note. WILL YOU MAKE ME A BOLOGNA AND MAYONNAISE SANDWICH? Zeke shook his head. Another note was shoved his face. BUT THE SHOWCASE SHOWDOWN IS COMING UP AND I DON'T WANT TO MISS IT! Zeke shook his head again.

“You didn't support, MY AIR FORCE TRAINING, DAD,” Zeke yelled, accentuating every word so his father understood. He then threw the notes to the floor and pulled Mindy into his bedroom.

She seemed nervous, but that turned him on even more. Let's face it, she wasn't a prize, and he was looking for anything to arouse him. She sat on his bed, twiddling her thumbs and exuded a smell that was close to an old tuna fish sandwich. But shouldn't that jarring imperfection be the something that made her wonderful? Her head

certainly had an odd shape to it, almost pumpkin-like, and her hair had the consistency of hay. He turned on some Guns N' Roses to put her in the mood. "Welcome to the Jungle."

"Did you have a good day?" Zeke asked, making room on his waterbed and facing her like an interviewer. David Fucking Letterman.

"Y-y-y-yes, I did," Mindy replied with a stutter and a lisp. A stutter *and* a lisp! Zeke had not noticed that before. It was one thing to have hair that looked like hay and a Halloween head, but coupled with a stutter and lisp was all too much.

"Are you having a good life?" he managed to ask between burps.

"What?"

"You heard me the first time, Mindy. I asked if you were having a good life?"

"Are-are-are you?"

"Who's David Letterman?" Zeke yelled, pointing at his head.

"I don't know," Mindy said, twiddling her thumbs, unable to look him in the eye.

"This is how it works. I ask a question, you give an answer. That's the magic of life. So, answer me!"

"Okay!" she cried. "My life is g-g-g-good."

"Well, I will never fly in the Air Force. I bet you didn't know that."

"N-n-no, I didn't."

"That is something very important to me. And if we are going to have a relationship, I think it's something that you should know. Also, I am missing a certain digit on my right hand. Not the ring finger, I can still get married. Not the middle finger, I can still say *fuck you*. Not my index, I can still point, and not my thumb, I can still

hitch hike. It is my pinky. A worthless, little blob on the end of my hand that no one ever thinks about and no one appreciates. Well, I appreciate it, and I would do anything to get it back. Then I could fly in the Air Force.”

“I-I-I’m sorry, Zeke. But who-who told you that you couldn’t fly?”

“My father.”

“Was-was he an Air Force pilot?”

“A long time ago.”

“Well, m-m-maybe policies have changed and he was mistaken?”

At that moment Mindy morphed into the most beautiful creature to walk on this Earth, a goddess plucked by Zeke, who saw past her pumpkinesque surface and discovered her inner aura of awesomeness. He would make love to her with Guns N’ Roses jamming in the background. And somewhere in the middle of “Paradise City,” Diana opened the door as he rode Mindy like a beached whale and her porpoise squeals bounced off the walls.

Skwaneweee! Skwaneweee! Skwaneweee!

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After putting on their pants, the two lovebirds walked out to the living room where his parents sat facing one another.

“You should have knocked,” he said to his mother and kissed Mindy on the cheek. She blushed.

“Zeke,” Diana began with tears in her eyes. “Zeke, Gibson is dead.”

“He’s what?”

“Dead. This afternoon. He was hit by a speeding car and died.”

Zeke wanted to feel sad, but his face showed no emotion. Something inside of him was blocking the grief receptors in his mind. Mindy plopped her head in her hands with shrieks of “omigod,” and Diana, as she did whenever a traumatic situation occurred, placed her hand over her heart.

“What kind of car killed him?” Zeke asked, a strange emotion washing over him now: excitement, curiosity.

“What?” Diana asked, dropping her hand to the side.

“What kind of car was it? The brand? You get what I mean, mother?”

He was growing agitated. One might attribute his irrational behavior to confusion and grief, but this went beyond that. A trickle of a smile appeared on his cold face. He rose from the couch and thrust his finger at Diana. She drew back, vividly remembering the coffee incident from a decade ago.

“I’m asking you a logical question, mother. What kind of car killed Gibson?”

“A Toyota something,” she wailed, giving up.

That was all Zeke needed to hear. He crossed one arm over the other with a superior grin. He had anticipated this tragedy. He had willed it to happen. His power was too great to imagine. They should all bow down to his god-like stature.

“I can rule the world,” he said to the room. The room looked back at him, vacant. “Don’t think I cannot do anything I put my mind to. And I’m going to join the Air Force. Oh, yes.”

A Chief Master Sergeant laughed in Zeke’s face. He stood blocking the front door; Zeke hadn’t even been let inside. Zeke had purposefully tucked his right hand with the missing pinky deep into his pocket, but that didn’t matter. This Sergeant with dents in his face and a massive forehead, what did he know? The nerve!

“What do you find funny?” Zeke asked, as the stub where his pinky once lived got all hot and sweaty.

“I know you, son,” the Sergeant said, spewing an intense mist of bad breath Zeke’s way.

“Know me how?”

The Sergeant folded one tree trunk of an arm over the other and shook his head.

“Your picture, son, has been on the wall for the last ten years. We know who you are. Your dad explained everything.”

“Explained what exactly?”

“Lemme see the right hand.”

His right hand quivered from out of his pocket and solemnly rose in the air. A right hand with only four digits.

“You need five,” the Sergeant said.

Zeke’s lips trembled, but he turned away before the Sergeant saw his tears. He blamed his father for destroying his dreams. He blamed his mother because he’d have all his fingers if not for her. He blamed Mindy for giving him hope, and he blamed Gibson for making him feel invincible. But Zeke wasn’t anything. He was just going crazy.

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He entered his house, an alien feeling his way around, out for blood, lost in his own misguided thoughts. He thought to grab the knife that had put him into this position, but was too lazy to find it. He couldn’t even muster the energy needed to fully commit to his insanity.

When he reached the living room, his family and Mindy waited for him, their eyes darting back and forth.

Mindy spoke first.

“H-h-hi, Zeke,” she said with a goofy wave. The others followed in sync, first his mother, then his father.

His father scribbled, DON’T BE MAD on the notepad hanging from his neck.

“I’ve lost it,” Zeke said, pointing to his head and collapsing on the sofa across from them all. Diana placed her massive hand over her heart.

I DON’T BELIEVE THAT, SON, his father wrote, and they all nodded in unison.

“What can I look forward to?”

“M-m-maybe getting better?” Mindy said, looking around the room for approval. Diana reached in the kangaroo pouch of her waitress uniform and passed him a brochure.

“Maybe you just need some time off,” she said. “You’ve gone through a lot today with Gibson and all.”

“Time off from what?”

“Life?”

They all nodded in unison.

“How does one realize they’re crazy?” he asked them. “Is it instantaneous, or does it happen in stages?”

“Open the brochure, baby, I think this is a long time coming.”

He opened the brochure. Pictures of various patients smiled back at him without a care in the world. They had ping-pong tables! Some of them even lounged in beanbag chairs! Friday night was Taco night! A tear slid down his cheek and rested between his lips.

“I’ve felt it happening to me over the years,” Zeke said. The lights around him dimmed and he stood in the darkness of his subconscious. His voice echoed out into the nothingness.

“I used to have this dream. I was in a race with Gibson and others. A bunch of sane and insane people all racing together. Of course it had to be three-legged, and of course the sane were faster, leaving the insane to be dragged along like rag dolls. My sane friend Gibson and I would be the last to cross the finish line, the losers in a marathon that finish after everyone has gone home. It wasn't Gibson's fault of course; I've realized now that it was impossible for me to keep up.”

Zeke blinked and was back in his living room, all eyes upon him. He thought of the day of the coffee incident. He had felt the insanity enter his soul like a giant wave rushing over him. After the wave passed, his brain never worked the same again. He'd lose focus, words escaped from his mouth that he didn't mean to say, and chaotic thoughts began to appear that he never imagined thinking. Some people have a calling – witness God, or whatever, this was his calling, and he'd have to embrace it.

Do others in the same boat ever get that far? Maybe they never cross that finish line, but not Zeke, he will eventually. At some point in his life, he'll see that ribbon appear along the horizon. He'll make it his goal to keep on running until he breaks through, even if he trips and is dragged along the entire way towards salvation.

So he closed the brochure, let out an emphatic belch and tucked his hands under his armpits as if the straight jacket had already been applied.

