

## *Look What Happened To Me*

BAYARD

Twilight in the window is all I remember. Not to suggest I spent any time looking through windows at twilight only there was twilight in the window where twilight and a window had never been before.

I hadn't moved. Hadn't changed. Lying in bed where I'd lain before, during and after, I remained the same, everything else had changed. My bed had grown larger. Distance between myself and the e-box had stretched themselves to great lengths. The e-box had multiplied. Where once there had been one now there were two, three sometimes four e-boxes playing programs looking strangely similar and I thought, "I'm seeing double, triple sometimes quadruple!"

Perceptual inconsistencies were nothing new. The self-medicating often see double, triple even quadruple. It was two, three or even four of the many exciting side effects of all the self medications I was addicted to.

I distinctly remember thinking to myself, "Is my breath fresh, kissing sweet?" And wondering if my teeth were film free and sparkling clean. Certain my self-medicating medicine cabinet held everything my addictions required, I worried it didn't hold enough deodorant for my mouth, armpits, crotch and feet. To say nothing of blemish cream and I felt a horrid scarring blemish coming on.

Worrying about the blemish growing on my nose I woozily asked myself, "Will I ever get back into life," and answered, "It all depends."

I had an unnatural craving for branded lite beer and cigarettes that were silly millimeters longer and a natural craving for the real thing.

As thin as I was I worried I might be too fat but remembered I'd rather fight than switch.

I wanted the burning match-like sensation in my piles to be squelched and more than anything else I wanted to tell the world a joke.

We all need to laugh, with depression over scarring blemishes as deep as mine, laughing might not have been a solid cure but it would get me to my self-medicating medicine cabinet for a pill. Depression could be easily handled with a simple blue pill taken twice daily.

I wanted to take a simple blue pill twice daily. I loved taking pills. Taking pills had become my life's work. Reaching for my self-medicating medicine cabinet wanting a Zovatrill, a Novatron, a Pluxtafux Plus with buffered action I have no idea what I took but whatever I took it was working. I still worried my mouth, armpits, crotch and feet smelled, only I didn't worry to the point of despair.

I was watching one of those programs on one of the sets in my room, or maybe I was watching two, three or even four of those programs on two, three or four of the sets in my strangely changing room when the pill I'd recently taken began to take effect. My eyes jumping in my head whether from side effect, nerves, or simply wanting to take in all the information the e-box or boxes was providing, caught a piece of the program here and a piece of the program there, until all the pieces of the program were in place like the giant jigsaw puzzle contestants on Put It All Together And Win A Big Prize might be made to do before being given the chance to win a new car, home entertainment center or living room furniture for a year.

With so much going on I became extremely stressed and reached for another pill. As the pill's calming effects washed over me, the pieces of my private jigsaw puzzle began to fit neatly together.

The program I was watching, a great old program, one of my all-time favorite programs, a shame it was finally taken off the air when host Slov Peaubanks, a lovely, jovial red haired man, left the air and this mortal coil, *We Find Your Family For You Or You Go Home Alone With Great Big Prizes*, was a program where the object of the program was for the program to find lost families for people who had lost their families and if they couldn't you'd get to go home with great big prizes like a new car, a home entertainment system or living room furniture for a year.

I was watching *We Find Your Family For You Or You Go Home Alone With Great Big Prizes* and a woman who didn't look old enough to have a family said she was looking for her lost family, most especially her son, *Everymans Orphan Earth*, which was me, and the audience burst into wild applause.

It was the most confusing moment of my life up to and including that point because no sooner had the woman who didn't look old enough to have a family say she was looking for me but Slov Peaubanks, host of *We Find Your Family For You Or You Go Home Alone With Great Big Prizes*, announced I was backstage and they were bringing me out.

The woman who didn't look old enough to have a family claiming to be my mother became extremely excited but not as excited as me watching the proceedings on the many e-boxes in my room, my head spinning, because I wasn't backstage I was in my room even though my perception was off and the room appeared bigger than usual.

I needed a pill. And when I need a pill and don't take a pill I am apt to obsess the blemishes on my nose to the point of hysteria.

Hysterical blemishes I didn't need and reached for my self-medicating medicine cabinet. Swallowing a handful of assorted colors I instantly felt better, more secure, calm. Taking as deep a breath as the shallow are allowed I saw myself coming from backstage to meet the woman who didn't look old enough to have a family claiming to be my mother.

She leapt from her chair like a professional athlete, rushed across the stage, grabbed the me on screen with a vengeance and hugged me very tight.

Her violent actions made Steve, the body building bouncer they have on programs of this kind, very mad. Steve was trying to extricate the woman claiming to be my mother off the me on the screen while she was screaming into her hidden microphone, "I look too young to be your mother. Don't dare tell anyone I'm your mother. Do you hear! Say I'm your sister and we'll all be all right."

Steve, the body building bouncer, finally got the woman claiming to be my mother but wanting to be known as my sister off the me on the screen as I wondered how they'd found me when I wasn't there at all. I was still in bed.

I was worrying my blemishes and knew I needed a pill and reached for one as the me on the screen and the woman claiming to be my mother but wanting to be known as my sister took our places across from each other in the uncomfortable guest chairs with the strangest nubby fabric covering I've ever seen. Those chairs are famous. That fabric is famous. That fabric is the same fabric the astronauts took into space with them. That fabric could resist all stains. Chocolate. Grass. Urine. Even, and especially, blood.

Steve, the body building bouncer, took his place between us to

keep us from hitting each other should we, like most guest victims on *We Find Your Family For You Or You Go Home Alone With Great Big Prizes* wanted to do to each other.

The woman claiming to be my mother but wanting to be known as my sister and the me on the screen eyed each other suspiciously. The woman claiming to be my mother kept gasping and crying and reaching out to grab the hand of the me on the screen and Steve poised between us kept slapping her hand away.

"Not now lady!" Steve kept saying, he had a strange accent or perhaps a lisp, "Wait till we go to commercial break and we can all get our hands on the tasty little morsel."

In my day and in my many professions to date I had been looked at strangely, I had been looked at funny but no one had looked at me as strangely and as funny as Steve, the body building bouncer, did on *We Find Your Family For You Or You Go Home Alone With Great Big Prizes*. He kept looking at me with that look that said, "We've known each other before, kitten." Which could have been possible, having known so many people in my many professions to date but I don't think the me on the screen had known him before or had ever been called kitten.

During the broadcast Steve would taunt the me on the screen by saying, "Just you wait morsel, just you wait till we go to commercial break." He'd wink his huge overly muscled eyes and lick his huge overly muscled lips.

I was having a great deal of difficulty paying attention to Steve and his well body built body, even though the me on the e-box couldn't get my mind off his well body built body, what with the woman

who didn't look old enough to have a family screaming, "Pay attention to me, Everymans! To me! I'm your mother! I mean your sister. Tell them! Tell them I'm your mother! I mean your sister. Tell them!"

She'd reach for me and the studio audience would boo. They'd hiss. They'd call her a hoe.

From my bed I understood the booing, the hissing but felt it unnecessary and uncalled for to imply this woman, whoever and however old she was, was ever a garden implement.

My piles seemed to light their own fires. As I reached for relief from my self-medicating medicine cabinet the woman on the screen claiming to be my mother wanting me to tell everyone she was my sister reached for the me on the screen only to have her hand slapped away by a very possessive Steve.

"Will you wait!" snapped Steve. "Will you wait till the commercial break and we'll all get our chance."

"It was a very tense, personal and emotional moment," said host Slov Peaubanks, caught on tape applying innocent looking freckles to his already reddening face.

The me on the e-box was shaking, shivering, ready to cry, tears spilling from my eyes. The body building bouncer gently stroked my hair as the studio audience taunted by chanting, "Cry-baby, cry baby, stick your head in gravy."

I want it on the record. I want it to be known. I have never been, nor will I ever be a fan of Cry-baby Brand Gravy. It may be just like homemade. But I often ask myself while eating Cry-baby Brand Gravy, "Where are the lumps?"

At nineteen having been through all I'd been through being of

sound mind and body and completely addicted to things I was supposed at nineteen to be addicted to, I spent little time eating. I spent most of my time worrying about bodily functions and the odors they might cause. I spent an inordinate amount of time worrying if that unsightly itch would ever go away, to say nothing of the time I applied to the worry of blemishes. Having been through all that it would seem plausible I'd have learned to say more than two words. But I'd been getting by quite easily with only those two words and hadn't bothered to learn more.

The me on the e-box pulling my hungry eyes off Steve's buffed body building body planted them on the woman who wanted me to tell everyone she was my sister and not my mother. Able to utter only two words I let them fly with all the gusto I could grab, "I want."

My mother, my sister, whoever she was lit up with saddened joy.

"I want, too," she barely got out before the audience exploded with wild hissing, booing and a too frequent raspberry.

Again I understood the booing, the hissing but what made the audience imagine this woman had anything to do with fruit? Fruit came from gardens. And this was not a gardening show.

Making a face at the audience that could have stopped time, the woman again turned to me and with all the motherly, sisterly concern she could muster repeated, "I want to...I want to capture this moment in mint flavored plastic and offer it to everyone watching for three simple payments of twenty nine ninety five limited to an unlimited number of firing days."

Steve believing we'd gone to commercial break grabbed the me on the screen and pressed himself close. So close I could taste his

breath on his tongue deeply implanted in my throat. It was minty fresh. Steve was about to bend the me on the screen over one of those stain resistant chairs the astronauts had taken into space when Slo Peaubanks started screaming, "Not now, Steve, you animal, wait till the commercial break!"

Steve grimaced and straightened his hair. The me on the screen looked disappointed. The studio audience were looking under their seats for the gift bags they'd been promised. From my bed the pieces of the puzzle began to take shape and offer a clearer picture than the picture offered on my many screens.

My mother, if indeed she were my mother, during all the time of our separation had discovered upon losing me a new spirituality. She'd become a truly spiritual person. She said so on one of her many insistent and oft times beautiful infomercials aired with subliminal frequency on all the better flea market channels.

I'll never forget those infomercials. How could I? They were so beautiful. The woman claiming to be my mother sister ambling through a forest glade, a light angelic mist lifting up to shroud her in gossamer, would enthuse about the blessing of motherhood while birds chirruped and wind and string instruments played a lovely sonata in the background.

"Precious Mentos," my mother sister would enthuse, "the stronger mint memento. No memento is stronger. I should know, I am a mother and a truly spiritual person. I share my love of motherhood and children in the little plastic figurines I have mass produced in a bleak foreign backwater where they honor neither mothers nor children. The children who hand cast these figurines from the cheapest of all



mint flavored plastics barely make a living wage. How else could I, a mother, a spiritual mother, offer these truly beautiful objects of art and culture at such a truly beautiful price. I've grown quite rich and have become something of a celebrity and whether you choose the timeless classic Mother Cradling Her Child, or the sweet Mother Hugging Her Child, or my favorite, Mother Nursing Her Child, my Precious Mentos figurines all come with a guarantee to satisfy. Only three payments of twenty nine ninety five and limited to an unlimited number of firing days. Operators are standing by."

This woman claiming to be my mother, wanting to be known as my sister, was the spiritual mother of Precious Mentos. She was quite rich and something of a celebrity. She said so in all her infomercials.

My head reeled. I needed a pill. I reached for a pill. I took as many as I could swallow. Wasn't it always the way. I'd say one thing and anyone listening would take it to mean something else. I'd said, "I want," and the spiritual mother of Precious Mentos, the host Slo Peaubanks applying more innocent freckles, the buff body building bouncer Steve, winking and licking his lips and now and again touching himself in a manner I'd grown very familiar with when it came to men in need, the studio audience who booed, hissed and condemned anything and everything anyone said by making strange garden references, and everyone at home watching including myself lying in bed worrying how my mouth, armpits, crotch and feet smelled and knowing in my heart I'd walk a mile if I could get out of bed, thought the me on the screen wanted my mother posing as my sister.

What the me on the e-box wanted wasn't my mother posing as my sister but an explanation for where my mother posing as my sister

had been all those years. Why had she waited so long to find me?

At the end of every *We Find Your Family For You Or You Go Home Alone With Great Big Prizes* program, which I remember being filmed before the program was simulcast live, was an update of what everyone on the panel, cast and crew were up to now that the show was over.

That day as I lay disoriented in my bed worrying my blemishes Slo Peaubanks was on his way to Disney World to film a special twenty fifth anniversary edition of *We Find Your Family For You Or You Go Home Alone With Great Big Prizes*. The studio audience was on its way home with a year's supply of licorice flavored dress and panty shields. The crew were going out on strike because their paychecks for the past seven episodes had gone rubber and though rubbers were suggested when engaging in new relationships, like the sudden shocking relationship Steve, the body building bouncer had with the me on the screen, ending before it truly began, I discovered I no longer lived on the streets.

I may not remember the program but I will never forget those commercial breaks. Never have I been so much in love for so short a time. As hard as I try I can't for the life of me remember Steve's name. He was almost famous being a body building bouncer. And though I can't for the life of me remember Steve's name I'll never forget the love and the great products being endorsed as we loved.

The announcer who was still announcing even thought the program had ended long before it had begun and should have been on his way somewhere to do something with someone said, "Everymans Orphan Earth no longer lives on the streets. Promising to correct his

addictive behavior he has begged his mother's forgiveness and has gone to live with his mother who insists she is his sister."

I wanted to reach for a pill. Pills were so comforting. Pills were so nice. Didn't they say so on all the pill related programming I watched while reaching for my pills. I wanted to reach for a pill when I realized why my room looked strange to me. Why my bed felt strange. Why I thought I was seeing double, triple and even quadruple. It wasn't me. It wasn't my room!

My disorientation wasn't the disorientation of the disoriented it was the disorientation of being disoriented by disorientation. I hadn't been seeing double, triple, even quadruple.

I gave my forehead a resounding slap. "It isn't the drugs," I said to myself with relief, "this is really happening."

The spiritual mother of Precious Mentos was really my mother. Posing as my sister she'd found her long lost little boy with the help of We Find Your Family For You Or You Go Home Alone With Great Big Prizes and installed me with four e-boxes in a giant room in the Precious Mentos Cathedral.

As disoriented as I'd become I couldn't know as I flopped around in my new giant bed the giant windows were two way glass. The twilight I remembered wasn't twilight but the glint of flash photography on the far side. I couldn't know I was on display. A sales tool. I couldn't know any of the millions of yearly visitors to the Precious Mentos Cathedral could slip a credit card into a slot and three easy payments of twenty nine ninety five and limited to an unlimited number of firing days later one of my mother's mint flavored figurines would be theirs. The most beautiful of all my mother's figurines. A figurine of a mother finding a lost child.

I couldn't know and frankly didn't care. How could I as worried as I was about the germs developing on my nose that might scar with unsightly blemishes.

"People shun people scared with unsightly blemishes," intoned an announcer from all four screens, "Fight unsightly blemishes where they start before they start. And avoid being shunned."

I didn't need to be reminded. I knew all about unsightly blemishes. I'd had unsightly blemishes and look what had happened to me. Reaching for my self-medicating medicine cabinet I took something and took something fast to fight unsightly blemishes where they started before they had a chance to start. □