

The Squeaky Door

The oak door opened on its squeaky hinges. The din of conversation stopped when the clown entered. Streaks of sweat carved rivulets in the white makeup, bleeding into the red simulated smile around his mouth and the red bulbous nose that sat crooked on his face. He walked to the bar and ordered. "Jackie-D, straight."

The congregation returned to their individual novenas.

The clown took the shot of Jack Daniels like a man. "I believe I'll have another," he told the bartender, pulling a \$100 bill from his yellow and lime-green baggy satin pants, and putting it on the smooth and shiny wood of the bar. The bartender left the bottle.

After the clown's third drink, he set the glass down and looked at me and nodded. I nodded back. "God, what a day," he said. He pulled his gloved hand through his green hair and let it fall back to the bottle. He poured another shot, then sipped. I was amazed at how deftly he slipped the glass under the clown nose to drink. What kind of hard day could a clown possibly have?

From behind us, I heard what the clown must have been dreading.

"Hey, clown."

God knows why, but I turned. The clown didn't.

"Not you, the other clown," the raspy, smoker's voice spat out. "Is that really your hair?" He laughed a rough, mean laugh.

With a tired look the clown turned. He faced a small man in a dark, expensive suit and Italian shoes. The clown had apparently heard the same tired lines from amateur would-be funny people before. "No, it's not," he said, pulling the green wig off, revealing a stalk of bright orange hair.

The boisterous drunk stepped back, wide-eyed, his mouth twisted in a way that showed he was about to vomit laughter. He tried to hold it in, putting his hand hard over his mouth. It was too late. Laughter leaked through his fingers. He turned and ran from the bar.

The clown put the green wig into the pocket of his pants and turned back to his drink. "Why don't they leave a guy alone?" he asked the reflection in the "This Bud's for you" mirror behind the bar.

The oak door squeaked again, and in walked another clown. This one wore an oversized brown-and-yellow checked suit, oversized shoes, and an undersized derby that was nearly lost in his bushy, yellow hair.

He spotted the clown at the bar almost immediately. He walked over to Orange Hair and mumbled a few words. I couldn't hear what was said, but they faced each other, big red nose to big red nose.

All of a sudden, Brown Suit pulled a crossbow from one of the oversized pockets in the suit coat, stepped back and fired. People screamed and ducked under tables, trying not to spill their drinks. The first arrow missed Orange Hair and stuck onto the mirror behind the bar with a large red suction cup. I pulled my beer close to my chest and moved over one bar stool.

Meanwhile, Orange Hair hid behind his bar stool and fired a water pistol at Brown Suit. His aim was deadly. Brown Suit was hit. He fell over, apparently dead.

Orange Hair walked over and bent down, going through Brown Suit's ample pockets. He pulled out a fire engine, a battle ship, a dump truck, and a 1946 Ford Coupe. He kept the coupe.

"You all saw it. He drew first," Orange Hair told the horrified onlookers, who were still under the tables with their drinks. "Why don't they just leave a guy alone?" was his refrain.

He walked to the bar, put the leaky water pistol down and threw back the last drink. He nodded at me again. I

nodded back. Then he backed out the door, holding the toy Ford and the water pistol. When the door squeaked closed, the bar patrons turned their eyes to the clown on the floor. Then we heard it. The sound of a car starting up outside the bar. It sounded like a '46 Ford Coupe.

It seemed like only minutes before we heard sirens coming down the empty street. Soon after that a dozen Keystone Kop clowns burst into the bar, one falling on top of the other, creating a big heap just inside the door. They shook themselves off and rushed to Brown Suit and surrounded him, each in turn pulling out a tiny magnifying glass.

I ordered another beer.

The investigation seemed to go on for some time before the officer in charge came up to me. "Here's something you don't see everyday." I thought he was talking about the dead clown on the floor. I was about to agree when he stepped back and pulled from his pocket a beach ball, a lit torch, and a bowl of fruit. He began juggling them. He was right. You don't see that every day.

While he was juggling, one of the Kops came up and whispered something in one of the captain's oversized ears. "What? A '46 Ford? Let's go." On his way out, he pointed at Brown Suit and ordered, "Book him."

With that, the crew picked up the body and tried to squeeze through the heavy oak door at the same time. After some struggle, they popped through the doorway.

A siren sounded outside and faded into the night. We all watched as the oak door squeaked closed. Tables and chairs were put back in order, patrons sat down and continued their conversations.

I turned back to my beer.