

Sunday Worship at His Great Shining Fountain

The Arnot mall in Horseheads, New York on Rt. 17, twenty miles from the PA border, is haunted by some powerful ancient entity. A jester who comes out mostly at night. Don't ask *me* why it's here. All I know is this place has been haunted before I ever I started working as a janitor overnights, back in '96.

The first night I really saw something I was making a second pass on the ride-on floor scrubber inside the anchor store Sears, back near home appliances. Maurice was way on the other side of the 1,050,000 sq. ft. property; that's how we did it.

We had walkie-talkies but they never seemed to work right, just like the video monitors: mostly static, plus sometimes they picked up other channels from somewhere else, raspy voices whispering in some language my uncivilized ass never heard on this Earth before.

We would both usually take a half of the mall and work our way towards the center, to the large ornate multi-leveled fountain. The fountain had four powerful geyser fountain heads, flanked by two white symmetrical Y support beams, and buffered by a verdant jungle of trees planted in two large polygon stone gardens attached to the walls of the fountain. In addition there was smaller triangle stone gardens and planters located throughout the rest of the mall.

Above the fountain was the food court, arcade, and movie theatre on the second floor, with vines hanging from underneath the glass barricades like tinsel and *above that* was the largest abundance of skylights in the whole mall, eleven in all.

Several light aircrafts, on loan from the nearby national soaring museum, hung under the skylights with a meticulous system of wires connected to different parts of the ceiling; one was a Schweitzer SGS 1-26, and next to that was a smaller Herring-Arnot glider, with a mannequin sitting inside wearing a rabbit fur aviator hat and goggles. The mall had even recently acquired a smaller-sized tethered dirigible.

There at the top of the escalators we would meet and share the upstairs cleaning and maybe relax at one of the tables, shooting the shit for a short while until Barney came in, followed on the heels by the senior mall walkers right at seven A.M. sharp.

So I thought I heard a loud bang in Sears over Q Lazzarus playing on repeat on my headphones; I had been obsessed with her song ever since I bought my red CD Walkman with my first paycheck here at Sam Goody and decided to pick up a random soundtrack *Married to the Mob* because I spotted Ziggy Marley on it, and because it was on clearance for \$3 at the front of the store.

I slid my headphones down the hairs standing up on back of my neck and looked around the empty store. It was my second month at the mall, and I started to get this eerie feeling inside me, which had happened a few times before working. Like I was getting smaller or something or like the store was getting bigger. Infinite.

It had happened inside JCPenny one night and then later another night in Waldenbooks. It was like even though I was right near the entrance back to inside the mall it felt like the entrance was getting farther away, and if I didn't leave *right now* I would be trapped. Foolish kid bullshit.

I started to put my headphones back on when I heard something behind me and felt a breeze on my face. Then another. I looked around the store some more and still didn't see nothing, but then I looked directly above me. Shhhhhhit. It was a freezer.

One of the nicer deluxe white display freezers on special for \$234.99 down from \$300 until next week, and the thing was floating what fifteen feet up, near the ceiling, sideways with the door hanging open. No not floating; it was moving up and down a little bit, and I could feel gusts of air on my face.

I don't know how long I stared up at it in a trance, a long time, the music still playing around my neck, *Goodbye Horses*, but I do know that when the fridge finally dropped, spinning end over end, I snapped out of it and dove off the scrubber at the very last moment before it crashed hard on top, knocking the damn thing over.

My Walkman hit the floor hard, the batteries and CD exploding out of it, but I didn't even look back. I scrambled outta that Sears, running almost as fast as when I was a young man and used to run three four miles every day, after that first long stint Upstate.

Flew all the way across the mall and fell in a sweaty heap on the damp beige tile flooring in front of Reba's diner near the east entrance, the solitary sit-down restaurant on the main floor.

"MAAURY! MAUR! MAA! CAA!" I was so outta breath I could barely speak; it felt like something was pressing on my vocal cords.

But after I calmed down some and told Maury what happened, I realized he was going to think I was crazy and pin the busted fridge and scrubber on me. Of course he would; who the hell's gonna believe a freezer was flying in the air? Plus there's no way in hell that scrubber

didn't need repaired or replaced and I knew that \$#@%ing thing cost at *least* three thousand dollars. And my black ass didn't have no three thousand dollars. No sir.

But ya know what the old man said?

He said, "Listen Kid. I know already." He said, "Why you think Bill was so fast to call you back with your background? You ever wonder why this job pays so much for this area, for cleaning bathrooms? For sweeping up popcorn? Hell he knows, a few of the higher-ups know, they gotta at least know *something*. You're about the eleventh person to work here since I started. And it's not just because I'm some asshole, obsessed with cleaning. That's why I *told you* to keep your headphones off and to throw coins in the..."

"WHAT ARE!?! YOU DIDN'T TELL ME SHIT MAURY! YOU..."

"Listen calm down! Trust me kid you don't wanna get angry here, I know you're upset, but if you just pay attention it won't harm you. And it's pretty rare. I haven't seen anything too strange in about two months...and hell I'll talk to Bill. He'll be ok about the scrubber; he won't blame you. There's a fund for it. I'll get him to get you a nice raise and some vacation days too."

"A *raise*?"

"Yeah you do a great job, Kid! I ain't never seen anyone else clean like you except me in my whole life; most people don't care. Plus I don't think He really *wants* to hurt anybody, just trying to give us a scare or something, trust me."

"Who Bill?" I asked, even though I knew damn well he wasn't talking about Bill.

"Nah kid. I'm talking about Him that lives here, *long* before this mall was ever built. Even before Washington sent Sullivan and his horses for their scorched earth campaign, and the

savages toasted to themselves for it every night even. Then a course the sons of liberty hadda honor em with markers all over PA and New Yark in '29, at the sesquicentennial. Hell that's the year before I was born too."

He paused looking off in the distance, gone far away somewhere else. Then he was back. That quick.

"People were starving all over the country but somewhere they found the money ta..."

"Susquehanna hotel? Wait *George Washington*?"

"Listen all you gotta know is He's got a sense of humor and He's *fair*. Just. He's... just feed Him coins in the fountain every night and clean up everything really nice and shiny like you been doing, and you'll be fine. Don't leave us kid. It'll be ok here." He paused again, but he stayed here this time. "This place needs you Sunday."

Jesus I wasn't some stupid shit-for-brains like in the horror movies they played upstairs who stuck around when I could have gotten away, but the truth was Molly was pregnant with Dizzy on the way, and nobody else was gonna hire some bipolar convict with a cleft lip scar who didn't get along well with others. Not at this pay. Barely half. Shhhhhhit.

Plus I rode the bus here, and the mall was only thirteen miles away from my apartment, freeway miles, the stop right before the airport. The bus came directly here and within six blocks of our place six days a week, and the scheduling worked out to where I only had to wait just over an hour each day after my shifts. What the hell else was I supposed to do? You tell me. There weren't shit to do in Elmira for a felon, not even some of the bottom-feeder temp jobs.

And truly I did enjoy the isolated freedom of the job with all the space, and Maurice wasn't lying when he said he would get Mr. Thomas to offer me a decent raise. Hell he even added on two weeks of paid vacation, as long as I finished out the first six months. And if I stayed for a full year he promised me I would be eligible for another week of vacation and health insurance for me and my family, including dental.

I made him put it down on paper.

I'd never had vacation days or dental insurance a day in my life, and I wanted my kids to get what they needed medically not just emergencies, like my childhood. So yeah I stayed on.

A couple of weeks before Molly had Dizzy I saved up enough to get a car. It was a red hunk of junk Buick, but it was better than the bus. On Columbus Day I set my alarm early for 1:30 P.M. and took her and the boy out to Olive Garden for a fancy meal to celebrate our little Dizzy on the way, plus Devon finally getting his act together and getting all A's and B's this term, even in English where he had been struggling the most.

A couple of weeks ago at the parent-teacher conference his 6th grade teacher Miss Murray told us that she had never seen a kid that far behind leap ahead that quickly before. She said every time she saw him now he had his head in some kind of book. I tried to hide it even from Molly, but hell that made me proud. He certainly didn't get it from me, and my Molly was street smart, she wasn't ever going to get scammed by a soul on Earth, but let's face it she wasn't going to win a Pulitzer either.

Oh did I forget to say the kid was going to be some special kind of athlete, no doubt about it. He excelled in baseball and basketball, hell even tennis; he just knew how to move and where to be in the game, all the parts you couldn't teach he already knew them. So a few years

ago when he started struggling with reading and developed that stutter outta nowhere I got real worried it might get bad enough to get in the way of his athletic promise.

In fifth grade when they told us he had to see a speech teacher at school I got upset and said they were picking on him, but Molly insisted he go and sure enough after a few months his stutter mostly went away and his mumbling improved.

So things were looking up. I had transportation for my family and money to treat them to a nice meal. That felt real good and Molly had finally stopped giving me shit about me not being able to take her to St. Josephs for her appointments. And I never told Molly, but I already did get pulled over speeding and got *real lucky* with a local cop who against all odds just jerked his thumb to the road for me to skedaddle the f&\$^ outta there.

We had a nice dinner. Me and Molly both got the chicken parm. They were huge out-of-this-world-sized pieces of chicken, but Molly still managed to finish hers. I got a box for mine, but of course that went bad in the car later. Devon got just spaghetti with sauce and salad and ate a bunch of breadsticks. We were all even dressed up, and I had even put on some cologne Molly got me as a gift.

Then after dinner Devon wanted to go to Champs inside the mall. A local teacher had started a floor hockey league, and Devon needed a real stick. I said why don't we go to the other plaza half-a-mile away to the Dick's, but then Molly mentioned she needed some pants for work. I told her there's a whole bunch of clothing stores by Dick's and a Walmart too, and she said, Sunday we are already here.

Jesus I should have known this would happen eating at the Olive Garden right across from the mall, but we had seen that commercial a few times and we were all really craving pasta

and red sauce. Me and Mol were at the very precipice of getting into a fight and ruining the whole day, and the fact was it was daytime out, still early afternoon, so I thought it would be ok.

In the middle of the day the mall was bright and safe, and I didn't feel any presence here. Not even at the fountain. I got Von, and even Molly, to throw some mint Sacagawea dollars in and the three of us walked up and down the whole mall. All the way to the East end with Penny's and the Army recruitment office to the South End with the pet store and Auntie Ann's and the big Furniture store with large glass windows.

The place was pretty slow for a holiday, mostly individual people or mothers with little kids in tow walking around looking at the storefronts. The bright sun shone down through the skylights, and even inside you could be part of the beautiful sunny day.

We got Devon a nice hockey stick at Champs, and he was pretty happy. Molly got some clothes for work at Pennys, and then she was hungry again so we all got milkshakes in a big red booth in the far back at Friendly's. We got a real friendly waitress who was real good with Devon and got him to chuckle a few times, and she even took a nice picture of the three of us on Molly's new camera, so a course I left her a nice tip.

For once everything seemed to be going swell. My parole was *finally* over, no piss tests, no random visits. I was finally free; this was my last chance. I had a real job now with real guaranteed hours, and I had Molly back and Devon was on a good path going to good places, and I wasn't going to screw it up again. Not for nothing.

We were leaving when Molly had to go to the bathroom again. She insisted. Then D was tugging at my arm to go to the arcade. I said nah but he ran there anyway, already faster than me, my own kid with all the damn potential in the world.

And that's the last image I have of him, running away smiling looking back at me holding his hockey stick. The cops asked could he have gone out the one entrance when I was going inside the other one? The entrances were right next to each other, but was it possible if I was going in the one side and he was leaving the other, especially if he was trying to run away? They said he could have hid and watched me behind the glass, and picked his moment.

At first the shitheads tried to use my history to blame me, but when they finally cleared me they just used my own words against me and asked if Devon was *that* fast could he have run to the stairs or the escalator before I had looked through the small arcade. Yeah it was possible, if you didn't know Devon and if you didn't know this cursed mall. And Molly never forgave me.

Instead of leaving me Mol went comatose 90% of the time when I was around, hysterical the other 10%. After she had Dizzy it got even worse for a while (postpartum) and I certainly didn't make it any better so I let her sister Kate take care of her and started being around less and less, picking up more hours whenever I could, sometimes staying until the afternoons, walking the same loop we all walked that day, sitting in that red booth for hours, or in Penney's dressing rooms, or one of the tables across from the arcade, hoping there were some clues, some way to find him.

Eventually I got another part-time job as a handler at the airport, dreaming there were major clues there too. Threw myself at work. Supported Molly and Dizzy from far away, worked when they were sleeping and slept when they were at work and school.

Sometimes I just rented a room at the hotel right next to the mall when I only had a few hours in between shifts. Became obsessed with finding him. Drank again for years and years. Lost myself but never missed work. Couldn't go a morning without it. You know that story?

And for almost thirteen years there was just a few scares on some holidays, burst pipes, that damn glass elevator, and massive objects moved to unexplainable places like the vintage '67 gold Dodge Coronet that was already inside the mall with about a dozen others for a local car show that they found balanced on top of the seats in the middle of theatre 11 and that mechanics ended up having to disassemble to get out, and two of the enormous brown matching planters that held the young Empire trees that must have weighed more than a ton that I watered five days a week, crushing the laminate counter in Arby's next to the arcade, the twisted branches growing up past the ceiling tiles, dead leaves everywhere.

Until one morning, I found myself over poor Maurice splattered on the floor behind the elevator near the shining fountain, the emerald water so clear it almost hurt your eyes to look, approximately twenty-five feet below the food courts, his blue janitor pushcart a twin to mine still in sight upstairs touching the railing of the glass barricade, next to the top of the escalators.

They classified it as an accident, even though the autopsy stated he had sustained more damage than you would have falling two floors. I saw him myself.

More damage then falling from the skylight, more damage then falling through the skylight frum an \$^¢&ing airplaned.

They classified what happened to those unfortunate kids spending loads of quarters playing the new Dance Dance Revolution game in the arcade on April 1 as an accident too. What a helluva mess that was to clean up, even after the Hazmat-suit cleaners left. It looked like one of them damn sci-fi movies with all them cleaning in there with all the arcade lights flashing they couldn't get to turn off.

The unidentified man Maurice found in the theatre bathrooms way back, with 16-point antlers wired to his head, almost a week before Valentine's Day 2001, the ones by the movie posters and the 50¢ fortune teller game, they eventually determined was a tragic _____, even though there was some debate on whether someone could ever hold themselves under water.

The violence with the couple outside of Spencer's and the Hershey's ice-cream parlor on the Northwest corner last year where the guy, terrified of the water in the fountain, and who used his own shoe as a weapon, was eventually reported as an isolated case of rabies, an unknown variant, but one that seemed to most closely resemble canine rabies.

The local papers were all quite busy indeed tracking a string of sudden violent perplexing crime sprees popping up throughout Chemung, Tioga, Tompkins, and Bradford counties.

Then after I was forced to take half of my six week's vacation after Maury died, cause of the potential for trauma, I became Maury and He started speaking to me. I picked up some 3rd shifts at the airport and didn't even tell Molly about what happened.

Boss hired a string of employees offering unbelievable starting pay and even some benefits, but still none of them stayed longer than six weeks. One nice desperate kid with a family and no car, who got down on his hands and knees to clean the gunk in the corners, tried to stick it out even after he saw some crazy shit inside Payless from outside in the mall and I spoke to him, *Trust me kid*, but he disappeared mid-shift two weeks after that. Poof.

It was becoming more and more frequent. Stronger. And reaching more places in the mall now, spreading outward from the center and into daytime too when He needed a thrill.

Some ancient rusty seaweed voice that rumbled inside my body, not my ears, like bass deep underwater. A voice that I could feel not here. He spoke so slowly. He understood me more than my Mol and little Diz she was starting to turn against me. But so much effort for Him to speak the words.

He intimated Devon was a warrior, fighting for *eternaliality* my son, my own flesh and blood, not dead, not kidnapped. Some nights He didn't speak at all and some nights it took the whole night for Him to get out a single command or prophecy. But lately it was getting easier.

Oh much easier and much cleaner two ahhhh.

Come visit ust. Stop on bye. Poke in tha korneers.

They saw mills are smarting to dye out, but oh I must distagree.

They saw online shopping is the new thing and everybody's start starting to-liverd, but I must say their wrong serrr

Te be her in person ist tha thing. It has always been since the Dawn of man.

How are ya gonna to try on shoes over the computer? Paantsd? Forget aaboaatt et. ehh

Listen to me.

Invest in ah engagement ring for your sweetharhart even if there's even the smahllest suspishon of luff

Do it now. Donn't wait. whir rraalc glub

*Are have two jewelry stores always that hold gold rings sah and beautiful shine stones
that catch the sun from the skilight and shine like prisms or halos, a thousaand diff rent ways
whirm ice sling*

They can be set however you wished

We're not dead we're not deth. No not eerm shhhhh mog

*Come here and forget about all about it. All fun here. left home. follow buss moost trax.
Urn it nab dol chase ewwwwe*

*List-en just throw some quarters in fountain, make a wish list but you have to say it out la
la loud or else it won't come true! Youre most elabradorite fantasies. No judge nosireehe what
you really want to most in the worlds It's all faair gamep plust Anything you want to know. Ore
friends true loveers booth? It's alld rich no stop.*

*Come for some slaaxx and sum new sneaker fore claasss that squeak on the stone floors,
then stay an enjoyble affordable upscale meal at the Friendly's with yer whole family. The hole
bunch aff um ama. Rune Aer fa rice sirrrre please stttt*

*Stay for nice show upstairs late-night, order some kinda mouthwatering buttery popcorn
a jumble one so it can get a refill, a boxx of the Original Red Hots hots, oh aannd daa big cold
drink, exxtra ice so cold it dulls yer front teetthh. So twaann ojjib err glub waah*

You can't get that stukk at home averyday ya know, the whoorl xxperience.

It's ma maagikk. All things pass past stop past please no

'here's mothing else like it en no whorl whirl-da.

And finished leafing a show with your family is a part of it too, the rest uhf the mall closed, dark and quiet like a tome but every sound echkoing and before its long dark drive home in the backseats on the highway like Huckbelberry's raft in the RivhrStix you might just see me she meon no haan rundi anshe oh god NO, Sunday, riding my deluxe scrubber machine every night of the week plus a few afternoons now, up and down, around and around, overtime until they can find someone else to cover, buffing the whole mall myself, past the shrieking birds in the Pet Store and the silent dogs behind the glass, cowering in the corners of their pens.

Not afraid to smile now that my cleft scar is all healed, and the hair on my balding head is even growing back, but still quite apprehensive about the new Mark Twain-themed Escape Room set to open next month where the Mayers magazine and tobacco shop used to be until the considerate manager Blake _____ himself, zipped inside a sleeping bag in the back room, the week after Xmas, so there wouldn't be a mess.

Always keeping alert, never getting too close to any cords or anything heavy or electrical and *always* paying tribute with any coins I can get my hands on from 1763, usually threepence or Kopeks or Roubles, same thing with 1789, and 1791, sometimes spanish silver colonial reales, sierra leone company 1 cent Lions, French sols, or east Indian company Mumbai (bombay) copper 1 pice, but 1780 was quite easy with Maria Theresa Thalers frozen in time.

The more recent years I am required to be more specific: american silver seated Liberty quarters from 1845, 1862, and 1863, replica \$10 Indian Head Eagles with Lady Liberty wearing a Native feather headdress from 1907 (with the omission!) and also 1912 (no omission but ok served chilled), Mercury dimes from 1918 with Lady Liberty wearing a winged Phrygian cap, copper Buffalo Indian Head nickels from 1929, 1930, and 1935, Roanoke Island half dollars

from 1937, 90% silver Franklin half-dollars from 1962, Kennedy half-dollars from 1967 with a grooved edge, and newer mostly nickel clad quarters from 1977 and 1981 with Washington's smug face or "___" or "Trust" scratched off, 99.9% pure Silver Eagles from 1986, 1988, 1991, and 1999, New Hampshire, New York, and North Carolina state quarters from 2001 and 2002, Tennessee, Sierra Nevada, and Kansas state quarters from 2006 and 2007, and finally golden shiny Sacagawea dollars from 2001 and next year with little Jean Baptiste Charbonneau slung in cloth on her shoulder, before cleaning and worship at the fountain, and rarely, not very often at all actually, offering a sacrifice.

Only recently, not even the morbidly obese opossums, unchanged since the Upper Cretaceous Period, that I feed at home like Thanksgiving turkeys or the frenzied tabbies or hares (Leporidae), or even the gray cockatiels, the single member of the genus *Nymphicus*, with their yellow crests vertical who could imitate the humans, would quench the unhinged smiling canine black maw that was like staring up into hypnotizing furry outer space with teeth, pink time burning like a taper underzee, oh Great One, His bottomless thirst and infinite wisdom.

CaacrinolaasCaacrinolaasCaacrinolaasCaacrinolaasCaacrinolaasCaacrinolaas! And soon His 36 legions! Join us!

Fall to your knees on the immaculate shining floors for eons, bathed in the radiant brilliance of two of the fairest round golden white suns (His eyes!)

Then it sings His eternal Name that echoes through the stores, halls and out through the glass doors and skylights, sprinkling the homes, trees, crops, the muddy Susquehanna River, Red Jacket Motel, the trucks roaring by on 86, Ithaca, Savona, car dealerships, jails, Spanish Hill, TKäen DōD (painted post), Big Flats, banks, The Haunt, Crystal Lanes, daycares, preschools,

Snyder Elementary, wawa's, factories, libraries, donut shops, Seneca Lake, o'brien's, harris Hill, Cornell, dandy mini marts, The Palace Theatre, Centralia, Corning Museum of glass, wegmans, cargill slaughterhouses, Dryden, gift stores, gyms, guthrie, Tunkhannock, bimbo bakery, Canandaigua, the sky riding on airplanes, consumer square, Shamokin, Watkins Glen, Owego, Oswego, Otsego Lake, rest stops, state Parks, penn state, state police Barracks, think-tanks, The Iron Kettle, Tioga downs, st joseph's, Chemung and Chenango Rivers, Lake Oneida, Twain's octagonal-shaped writing cabin in Kanawaholla (Hellmira), homeless shelters, fallout shelters, Towanda, Tonawanda, chains of graffitied railroad cars, post boxes, fire stations, bars, and churches.

Then the entire Six Nations: Binghamton, Rome, Utica, Syracuse, fall from Onguiaahra (Niagara Falls) to Buffalo then ride Lake Erie West to Cleveland and Waawiyatanong (detroit) bob up Lake Ontario to Toronto and dive East on (amusing charbroiled) St. Lawrence River rafting past Tiohtià:ke (Montreal) south to Lake Chaplain floating through VertMont to Albany, then serf Shatemuc to Poughkeepsie, hop along to Mannahatta (the Big Apple) out to the Sea of Atlas, swimming up through the freezing waters to Shawmut Peninsula (boston), then reverse and backstroke Westward in the waters to Erielhonan (Eerie), following a southern trajectory again, away from the cold.

Jump in the Allegheny to Dionde:gâ (Pittsburgh), ford east the smaller streams and brooks and creeks through Riddlesburgh and Defiance to Paxtang (Harrisburg), then doggy paddle to western Lenapehoking (Φιλαδέλφεια), and take a plunge down down to d.see. and Virginia, soaking into the land itself like radiation, toxic waste, or vengeance but much older than that, with the ability to go *deep* under the surface with an enthusiastic half-life you couldn't

just bury in bloodshed, concrete, or alt history and expect it to grow weaker, not in a thousand,
not even in a hundred-thousand-years!