

Guy Talk, Girl Talk

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Nature Walk

Having grown up in the city and spending most of my life in a concrete jungle, I didn't really have an opportunity to get comfortable with nature the way someone from the country might. The only exposure I had to the 'wild' is through TV programs, books and the occasional breast revealing National Geographic magazine. Tarzan, I wasn't. Consequently, my comfort level in being around any sort of animal other than human was less than one might consider optimal. In fact, in many cases I possessed absolute phobias where certain animals or insects were concerned. The only wildlife I ever encountered was the occasional squirrel, pigeons, rats and yes the dreaded, somewhat arrogant New York City cockroach. The thought or sight of any of the above was enough to get me to lose my appetite. I was a clean city boy, and that was that!

Although this was in conflict with the macho image I usually project, the sissy side of me sometimes showed itself. It's not something I normally stand on a soapbox about but the truth is the truth and so it shall be told.

It was one of those weekday nights when I didn't feel like going out on the town, so I decided that it would be a good idea to get a decent night's sleep for a change. Throwing off the encumbrances of all clothing, I hit the sheets about eleven o' clock and was off into never-never land at a time when I normally was in high gear at some bar or club. It felt wonderful to indulge myself in a warm comfortable snuggle, alone.

It must have been about two in the morning when I remember becoming aware of a sensation, which caused me to react suddenly. I was sleeping on my side with my head resting on my left arm and my face snuggled between my chest and armpit. My right arm was resting somewhere in the region of my abdomen and my legs were crossed one over the other in somewhat of a fetal position. What I felt was a slight tickling sensation under my left arm, which caused me to react while still in my almost unconscious state. I reached up with my right hand to alleviate the tickling itch, and in a slow methodical motion began a short ritualistic attack on the problem area. I vaguely remember having also made some of those lip-smacking sounds you make when your sleep is disturbed.

Suddenly, without warning, I felt what seemed like a rather large object move rapidly and with a strong degree of determination, from my armpit, down my chest, over my abdomen, skirting my pubic region and continuing down my entire leg only to seemingly disappear beyond my big toe. Needless to say that this got my attention and in the instant of time where one begins to regain consciousness upon being abruptly awakened, my mind tried desperately to analyze the stimulus, which brought me to a state of semi-awareness. Now I had to deal with the facts.

“What the fuck was that? Am I dreaming? Was it a mouse? It felt like a small truck with legs. No, it can’t be! I don’t have any mice in this apartment. Or is it? O.K. let’s be rational here. It’s probably just a dream but just in case it’s not, ...I have to take action.” I was now regaining some control from my stupor, and logic began to rule my actions. I was a clean freak, and I knew that my apartment was insect and rodent free so what could this possibly be?

I did what any normal red-blooded macho American male would do under these circumstances, and I did so instinctively. I screamed like a little schoolgirl who had just been goosed by the schoolyard bully. And if that wasn’t enough, in an effort to destroy the enemy who had violated the sanctity of my dreamland bliss, I began to pounce on and slap the sheets like a madman to crush the uninvited intruder. At the same time I was blurting out several irrational expletives. That is, if there was indeed an intruder. At this point I still wasn’t sure if it was a dream or not.

As I regained some semblance of rationality, I said to myself, “OK, settle down, everything’s going to be OK. You’re a big boy, just get out of bed and assure yourself that it was just a dream, and you can get back to sleep.” It was as if I were suddenly five years old and the voice inside my head was one of reassuring parental intervention which dismissed the monsters in the middle of the night and returned you to the security of a protected environment.

But Mommy and Daddy weren’t there so I had to do it all by myself. I got out of bed, shook off the remaining sleepy daze, turned on the light and readied myself for action. Slowly and methodically, I pulled back the bedcovers in search of the dreaded intruder. The first quarter of exposed bed revealed nothing. The second quarter, nothing and the third quarter, still nothing. “You see,” I said to myself, “It’s just my imagination.” Now I was ready. If there were anything under the covers at all, it would have to be revealed with the next pull. I was almost ready to accept the certainty of the dream theory.

Then, to my horror, the final pull of the covers revealed perched on the corner of the mattress, the largest, ugliest, disgusting, filthy, motherfucking, related to Satan himself, cockroach I had ever seen. This fuck was about two and a half inches long and about three-quarters of an inch wide. He was black and had antenna almost as long as his body. He sat on the corner of the bed in defiance of my presence and waved his antenna as if he were flagging in a plane at the edge of a runway. The sight of him triggered my deepest childhood fears. Man, I don't like fucking bugs! And I don't like them on me!

Suddenly my fear turned to anger. How dare he come into my bed and foul me the way he did! For this he must die!

I have to admit, I can't say that at this time I was the most rational person I could be. In fact, it was quite the opposite. Being totally naked, I had to prepare myself for the execution, and in a state of panic I quickly donned my shoes and grabbed what I thought to be the instrument of opportunity in this assassination, a broom. I returned to the bed the intent executioner and burst into a soliloquy that Hamlet himself would have been proud of. What a picture this must have made; naked wearing brown topsiders, holding a broom over my head, and screaming at the top of my lungs at two in the morning, "You dirty, filthy, mother fucker bug, roach, I hate you! You ruined my life! Get the fuck out of my house! I'm going to kill you, you piece of shit! Die fucker, die!" I wish I had this performance on tape because I don't believe that even Al Pacino himself could do me better.

Then, with swiftness and impunity the executioners ax came down upon the guilty demon. But wait, where is the dead victim? He's vanished! Gone! No trace! Nothing, nada! A stay of execution? Oh, no! Now what?

How could I have missed, I thought? He must be here somewhere. I'll have to find him. So I began a hunt for the dreaded bug for the next half-hour or so like the great white hunter hot on the trail of King Kong. I almost feared retaliation as I cautiously moved every piece of furniture and clothing I set eyes on but still no bug. I began to panic. I thought for sure that I killed him but there wasn't the slightest trace, no bug juice, nothing. He was still there, hiding, defying me even further, and readying himself, I was sure, for another attack. I looked high and low with no luck. I began to wonder if the bug was smarter than I was.

Then at about two forty-five in the morning, exhausted, frustrated, I did the only thing left to do. I went to the phone and dialed a familiar number and to the

startled voice on the other end of the line, I said, "I'm sorry to wake you, but I have an emergency." Recognizing my voice she said, "What's wrong? Are you OK? Are you hurt?" "No," I said. "I'm OK, but I need to stay with you tonight." "Can I come over?" "Sure," she said, "but what's wrong?" "Did something happen to your apartment?" "Well," I replied, "there is a bug..." Then silence.

During the pause that followed, I knew she was going through the same thing that I did in trying to analyze the information she just received after a startled awakening. She must also have been wondering if it was real or a dream. "A bug?" she questioned in a half-awake voice. "Yes, I'll explain later," I said. I quickly dressed and abandoned my apartment to seek the safety and comfort of Michele's welcoming yet groggy embrace.

Walking the four long blocks to her apartment, cold and tired, I remember thinking that I most likely would not survive if I were suddenly thrown into a natural world without the luxuries, cleanliness and isolation from sub-human life forms I had become accustomed to. By the time I got to her apartment my anger had subsided and in relating the details of the story to Michele, it struck me as quite humorous that a full-grown man had become terrified by and brought to the edge of civilized rationale by an insect. We laughed for a while, screwed, and eventually fell asleep.

It took several months for me to feel comfortable in my bed again and I remember the nights while drifting off to sleep, being suddenly startled and shocked back to full alertness by the thought of this happening again. I can still feel the fucker crawling on me. But alas, one fateful day while dusting off some books, there behind a copy of A History of Modern Art, was the dead, petrified carcass of the intruder lying on his back with those ugly bug legs curled in skyward testimony to his dying breath. Finally, closure. I must have wounded him, and he crawled away to die in the lonely recesses of my bookcase. Fuck him, I thought as I brushed him into a dustpan and flushed him down the toilet.