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Tater Toes Must Die

by Gregory K. Carter

Had Eunice spent thirty more seconds clipping her toenails that night, Floyd Spivey's life might have remained the same for years. His idyllic retirement might never have been ruined. He might still have been sitting there in his Lazy Boy, watching TNN from dawn until Dallas went off at midnight. He might still wake the next morning to start all over again.

But Eunice was quick with her Revlon's that night. She propped her big, ugly feet on the coffee table and had at it until the last crescent moon fell tumbling to their double wide's shag carpet. She looked up just as the dog spoke its first words.

“Y’all ceer fer a taco, Bill?” the dog said in one of those sissy foreign accents.

“Look at ‘im, Floyd. Ain’t that the cutest litte dog you ever laid eyes on. Oh I could just eat him up, he’s so cute.”

So slap him between a bun and squirt mustard on him, Floyd thought. Leave it to Eunice to think an ugly, shriveled-up, bug-eyed thing like that cute. Now she’s gonna want one just like it.

“Why don’t we get a little dog like that, Floyd?”

“Cause I’d kill it before it leaves its first pile on my carpet,” Floyd started to say, but then the Dallas theme started, and the thought vaporized in the magic of it all.

By the time JR had shafted Cliff Barnes for the third time that night, Eunice had gone to bed, and Floyd had forgotten all about the dog. Tomorrow would be just like any other Thursday, he believed. A blessed three hours of Eunice-free silence while she had her hair fixed at Milady Fair’s. At 4PM, she would walk in the door, her hair spiraling skyward like the Tower of Babel, all glued together with enough hair spray to blow a ten-mile-wide hole in the ozone layer. Then the two would go out to the Picadilly where Floyd could cleanse all the toxins from his system with a Dilly Platter and strawberry pie. He would then look at the tools at Sears for a couple of hours -- Eunice would never follow him there -- and then return to their mobile home in time for Nashville Tonight.

But at 4PM, that Thursday, Eunice walked in, cradling what appeared to be a big, brown rat. It seemed that Connie, the three-hundred pound cosmetician, bless her blubbery little heart, raised the wretched things, and for only \$79.95 plus the \$24.95 for a perm, Eunice could bring one home forever. So there he was, sniffing at Floyd’s feet

while Eunice gushed about how smart Tater Toes, as she had named it, was.

“Oh, him doesn’t talk like the one on TV, but him can shake hands, can’t him? Yesssss, show Daddy how Tater Toes can shake hands.”

Floyd felt something warm and wet trickle over his slippers.

“Mommy needs to potty train Tater Toes, yes, her does. Yeessssss, her does.”

He could stuff the dog down the garbage disposal later --Right now Floyd just wanted to change his shoes, get out of the house and get to his Dilly Platter. Eunice would have none of it.

“Mommy’s baby needs some D -- O -- G food, yes, him does.” Eunice dropped the dog in Floyd’s lap. “Now you mind Daddy until Mommy gets back,” she told it. Before Floyd could utter the appropriate profanity, Tater Toes had defiled Floyd’s pants, and Eunice had left with Floyd’s pickup truck. She returned with three cases of Mighty Dog, some squeaky toys and twelve pounds of WD Brand sirloin -- none of which would ever pass over Floyd’s tongue.

Eclipsing Floyd’s thirty-inch Toshiba with her bloated, bowling pin body, Eunice showed Floyd the little sweater she bought Tater Toes, and the precious little boots, and the pink rubber thing with a bell on it, and the raw hide bone, and the Master Card receipt that congratulated the Spivey’s on the new credit limit that helped pay for it all.

“And Floyd,” she said, “we just can’t eat out like we used to, what with Tater Toes’ special needs.”

Floyd spent all that next day trying to get the garbage disposal to work. Now that he needed it, the stupid thing wouldn’t grind butter. The hole was too small, anyway. Even for Tater Toes’ little pointed head. Floyd had a better plan. All he needed was a

week's supply of Decon.

Whether or not Tater Toes noticed that his Mighty Dog tasted funny that night, he ate it all just the same. Floyd took out the garbage, expecting to find the little monster legs side up when he returned. Instead, Tater Toes had barfed all over Floyd's Lazy Boy, and left with Eunice for the vet's.

"We can't feed him cheap dog food anymore," she explained upon returning. "Him's gotta delicate constitution. Yessss, him does."

Eunice tossed out all of Floyd's Cheese Puffs and Pretzels and Beer Nuts and restocked the entire kitchen with eighty cans of imported dog food -- Le Chien de Royal. Four bucks a pop. Three-hundred and twenty dollars worth of Baluga, escargot and chicken parts that would soon find its way onto Floyd's carpet.

Before his house looked like a cow pasture, Floyd decided to act. Tater Toes was about to run away from home for ever and ever.

Thursday morning came, and Floyd waited while Eunice buried her face behind six layers of makeup. How nice of Floyd, she thought, to take me to Milady's and little Tater Toes to Pet Land. My, but how those two get along.

By the time Connie finally motioned Eunice to the chair, Floyd and Tater Toes were three states away. Which state it was, Floyd wasn't sure. South Carolina, he thought. Somewhere along a dirt road, miles from the nearest Starvin Marvin's, Floyd pitched a blind-folded Tater Toes into a dense patch of forest primeval.

Three-and-a-half hours later, Floyd picked up Eunice at Milady's. "Floyd," she said.

"Yes, dear."

“What’s Tater Toes doing in the back of the truck?”

Floyd looked up to see Tater Toes staring back through the rear-view mirror.

Floyd then realized that he was dealing with the very incarnate spawn of Satan.

For the next two weeks, Floyd decided he had better try to live peaceably with Tater Toes. After all, who’d a thought the Antichrist would’ve been a dog? Tater Toes left his calling card everywhere, Floyd’s shoes his favorite depository. Floyd would wake up in the middle of the night and see the dog’s face staring down upon him, a warm wet stream soaking his night shirt. Tater Toes would bark all through Dallas, too. Everytime JR opened his mouth, Floyd heard nothing but “Yap, yap, yap.”

Then one morning, Floyd’s hand slipped on some dog poop left on the remote. Channel 33 popped up where Floyd caught the tail-end of a National Geographic special.

The narrator told of a wondrous land where men were men and dog meat a delicacy. Floyd scribbled down the country’s name and handed it to that weird guy down the road who played with computers and never talked to girls.

“Me and the Mrs. are driving out that way this summer. Yeah, that’s it. And we wanna find the best restaurant there. Yeah, and make reservations and we’ll need the address so’s we won’t drive past it.”

Fifteen minutes later, Floyd returned home with the address of Hiki Tiki Wan’s in Borneo. Fine Malaysian cuisine, great wine selection and the best dog anywhere. Floyd’s mouth watered. Perfect.

That afternoon, Floyd took Tater Toes for a little drive from which he would never return. Not even the Evil One could foil this plan. The UPS guy could’ve sworn he

heard a barking sound coming from Floyd's toaster.

"That's why I'm sending it back," Floyd said. "It barks when burning my toast. Yeah, that's it."

Ten days later, after Floyd had magnanamously endured Eunice's wailing, a big brown truck pulled up beside Floyd's trailer and dropped a toaster-size box at this doorstep. Like a scene in a slasher movie where the victim has to open that door and go in that dark room, Floyd opened the package.

Two notes were taped to Tater Toes, still merrily chewing away on a thirty-six ounce sirloin. One, a Xerox copy of King Niouafouwawoohoo's latest proclamation after the king had eaten his first chalupa was concisely summoned up by the second, a hand-written note from the Hiki Tiki Wan's chef -- "Taco dog sacred now. No killee Taco dog."

This evil poop machine was immortal, it seemed. Floyd thought about flushing it down the toilet, but just guess when Houndini would rise again? No thanks.

Just when all hope seemed to vanish as completely as the available balance on all his credit cards, Floyd heard a knock upon his door. He opened and there stood little Bobby Vickers.

Floyd thought Bobby looked like one of those outer-space kids he had seen in a movie once. One look from their glowing eyes, and your intestines would explode. Everyone called Bobby "Damien" behind his back, though Floyd didn't know why.

"You gotta problem," Bobby simply said. "I've gotta problem. Let's talk."

Somehow Bobby knew of Floyd's torment -- just like those Outer Space kids. "I can make the dog go away," Bobby said.

“How?”

The boy grinned. Floyd thought he caught a shimmering glow in the boy’s eyes.

“The threat of litigation and the long arm of animal control can work wonders, Pops.”

“So what’s in it for you?”

“One crisp mint, first edition Charizard Pokemon card.”

About eight-nine percent of what followed, Floyd couldn’t comprehend.

Something about faking a dog bite, parents threatening to sue, some kind of out of court settlement for the going price of that Pokeyman thing. It made little sense to Floyd. He only went for it because of the grand finale -- Animal Control hauls Demon Dog away.

No one seemed to wonder why Tater Toe’s bite looked just like the imprint of a plastic army man’s carbine. But when the Vickers’ shoved the doctor’s bill in Eunice’s fat face, when they placed the business card of Charnel, Charnel and Tackem in her fat fingers, she had little recourse but to take the mad money from the mayanise jar and hand all one-thirty-six of it, greasy though it was, to the Vickers. That’s when Bobby found out that the price of Charizard had hit the double-century mark on ebay. The original offer must naturally be amended.

“Listen, old man. Either you fork over three-hundred smackers, or I’m taking you to court and when they get me on the stand, I’m squealin’. Understand? You, the dog, the trip to South Carolina, the toaster. Everything. The whole enchilada. Or should I say taco?”

Floyd sold his George Strait tapes, his Daytona 500 watch, his Dale Earnhardt Pepsi cans, everything he could drag down to the flea market. That Sunday afternoon,

he handed Bobby three crisp Franklins.

“Too late, Pops. Pokemeister@AOL.com’s gotta lock on a Charizard lot that I aim to break. High bid’s showing 725, so I gotta have a grand-and-a-half or I’m taking you to court.”

Eh, he’s just a little kid, Floyd then realized. Just big talk. Give him the three bills, a couple of popsicles, and he’ll forget all about it by nightfall. Three days later, Floyd found himself in the Buncomb County courthouse.

Day one could be summed up with this highlight from Bobby’s testimony:

“Now tell us, son. What did the bad man do?”

Boy weeps. Hides face from sweating defendant before him. “He made me do it. He made me lie.”

Audience gasps. Jurists stare and shake their heads and slash their hands across their throats.

“He promised to do awful things to me if I didn’t lie for him. He was going to hurt that little dog and tell Mommy and Daddy that I did mean things and Santa Claus too and I wouldn’t get any presents for ever and ever and nobody would ever like me again, not even my Aunt Judy because he would tell Aunt Judy that I had egged her Corvette when it had been him egging her Corvette but he would tell Aunt Judy that I had done it and Aunt Judy would hate me and Mommy and Daddy would then send me away to a detention home where the man in the black hat would beat me and not give me another serving of porrage.”

Defense attorney asks to be removed from case. Judge agrees, defense attorney leaves after spitting on defendant. Prosecutor contines.

“What else did this monster do?”

Boy’s head bows low. Tears trickle down his cheeks. “Well, sir...he...he...And then he...”

“Yes, son. Tell the court.”

Judge leans forward. Jury looks on through tearful eyes. Courtroom hushed by one concerted, breathless, sigh.

“And...And then he touched me in a bad way.”

Floyd had to serve only fifteen of his 125 year sentence, thanks to miracle drugs from Mexico and the special surgery approved just for him.

He now lived just outside the Buncomb County landfill, in a little shack surrounded by “Beware the Pedophile” signs. But he had plenty of company -- these pungent environs could attract dogs from across the county. And when the truck from Smithee’s Slaughter House dumped the month’s garbage out, they all had plenty to go around.

Stretched across Floyd’s eastern horizon, blocking out the morning sun, stood a giant billboard with the 60 ft. likeness of a little brown dog. Watch the “Adventures of Taco Dog,” it read, Thursdays on ABC. Starring Tater Toes, the indestructible pooch. See him now on the big screen this March in the feature film -- Escape from Borneo.

There was a moral here somewhere, but darned if Floyd could figure it out. Something about white whales and little brown dogs, perhaps. But Floyd kept smiling anyway. For one of the many interesting characters he had met in San Quentin had been a psychopathic sadist who specialized in taxidermy. Son of Ty would be free soon, and when free, “Beanie Man” and Floyd would hop aboard a Greyhound -- ironic,

ain't it? -- and head for the set of Taco Dog. For Tater Toes would soon acheive the only immortality fit for a dog -- an eternity bobbing its lifeless head from the back seat of Floyd's Tiajuana taxi.