

Whack-a-Mole

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I figured once that my problem is I think way too much about the way people talk. I can't help noticing every time someone says something that don't make sense. Even way back in ninth grade some English teacher was going on and on about Hemingway's style (I always thought he should've spelled it Hemmingway, but the bastard always had to be different just to be different) and he says something that ain't right and I say—right out loud, not even thinking about it or nothing—"What the hell does 'extremely ubiquitous' mean?" The class gets real silent except for this one girl who only had two things going for her and they were both between her chin and her navel, and she starts giggling. And the teacher smiles like my kid brother when I ask him if he's been cheating on his left hand again and I just wait because I know nobody in the whole stupid shit class even knows what the word means except me and him. So he looks around and figures out I got him by the short hairs and says, "Perhaps just plain 'ubiquitous' would be better." And he says it with a great big question mark at the end like he's saying, "Don't you think, Mr. Dictionary?" And I'm thinking that it ain't my fucking fault if I know the goddam word.

So everybody knows I won that one, but he thinks I'm the big Word Inquisitor now and starts choosing everything he says real careful so I look like an ass. But I'm sitting there thinking about what he said and I want to stop the class and tell him that there ain't no "perhaps" and there ain't no "just plain", that yes,

indeedie “ubiquitous” would be better and that if he knew how to use it proper he wouldn’t have to modify great big fucking words with little slangy words just so everybody thinks they should know the big fucking words. But I keep my mouth shut because I figure he’s getting paid to snow us and if I keep it up he can’t do his job.

Well, anyway, that was the first time but it hasn’t gotten any better since then. I keep hearing people doing just what that English teacher did. And every time I hear it I’m just glad that they’re only talking to me and not trying to murder me because if they were trying to kill me they’d try it with a goddam butter knife instead of just blowing my brains out and getting it over with. That’s why they do it, because they’re afraid of words all by themselves. Like when this girl tells me, “To tell you the truth, you’re a bit of a bore”—well I thanked her up and down because everybody I knew was a bore and if I was only a bit of one, then I’d put a lot of distance between me and them and I didn’t mind that at all. But she just tells me that she thinks I’m crazy and I tell her that it don’t matter what she thinks because either I am or I’m not and what she thinks has no bearing on insanity and she just walks away. Good riddance. And if she’s out there right now waiting for me to say I’m sorry, she’s going to have to wait until they paint the walls pink in Hell because I’m not.

And she ain’t the only one. The goddam world’s full of them. It doesn’t matter where you go because they come looking for you or you just stumble over them in the street. Like when I went into this place to get a hamburger and I say I don’t want any lettuce on it and the chick behind the counter looks at me like a fucking sheep and says, “We have two kinds of lettuce, which kind don’t you want?”

Then she looks at me like I'm stupid because I can't think of an answer to keep from being boiled in donkey piss on a slow fire. And I swear to Ghandi's ghost that I'm trying to figure out what she wants from me, but it just ain't sinking in. So the only thing I can say is that I don't want any fucking lettuce and she gets hotter than a faggot in a parade and says, "Don't swear at me" and walks off and I have to eat this rotten fish sandwich and I end up getting sick because of this cretin.

And just when you figure you're through with them, like when you go home at night, they start popping up like the little moles you whack over the head at amusement parks. Sometimes I even start think about whacking them with this big old mallet just like the little plastic dudes except I remember that they're people and you can't just pop in a quarter and smash their brains. And even if you could, you couldn't because they'd keep popping up just like the moles. Like I go home after the bimbo with the two kinds of lettuce and I'm tireder than a five-dollar whore in the Yellow Pages and I figure at least my mother won't give me any shit and I say, "Hello" and she says, "Where's the electric bill?" like I been out all day having fun with the electric bill and don't want her to know, so I say, "Which one?" just to jerk her chain a little and make her think I been squirreling away the electric bills for months. So she panics and starts screaming that they're going to turn out the lights and she won't be able to play canasta with Edith the one who almost won the lottery and her plumber husband and God knows who else and I tell her I ain't got no goddam electric bills and why is she so worried about it anyway? And she says it's the 28<sup>th</sup> of the month and the electric bill always comes on the 26<sup>th</sup> and it always says that you have to pay the stupid thing by the first and what with the mail system nowadays—and all I can think of is that she's starting to look like a

mole and why do old people always say “nowadays” like its some fucking curse to live “nowadays” when there ain’t even any such word. And I’m watching her eyes getting real narrow and the end of her nose is bobbing up and down and I swear the tip is getting black like a mole’s and it’s all I can do to keep from grabbing a lamp and watching her mole brains splatter and I figure if they turn out the lights maybe she’ll have a heart attack and I wonder what would happen if you just threw the fucking thing away.

So just when I’m starting to plot how to steal the goddam electric bill my aunt with no ankles walks in. And this really pisses me off because I can usually hear her clomping her elephant shoes up the walk and hightail it out the back door so I don’t have to listen to the latest embalming story. Every since she married this mortician who makes her take cold showers before bed she’s been dragging stiff stories over before dinner and she tells us how they had a real tough time with this one because the schmuck rolled his car just over the border in Mexico and it just so happens that the top was down and Mexicans ain’t too good at cleaning up the bodies before they call the next of kin a week later and then she wants to know if there’s anything to eat, maybe brains or something and she cackles and I’m thinking about locking her in a room with nothing but liver, lime sherbet, and Ipicac. Then she tells us she ain’t got no embalming stories. And I know she’s holding out on us because she don’t come over unless she can make us sick. And sure enough, she comes through. She starts in real sly telling us she took a drive out to the desert. Then she waits for us to ask what for because she knows my mother could no more stand not knowing than she could stop farting on pizza night. And since Mom doesn’t have the good sense to say, “That’s nice” and ignore her,

she says, "Why'd you go to the desert for?" Well, Aunt Bertie's got a good one this time. This time the guy wants to be cremated so they oblige him and sweep up the ashes and he fills up one whole goddam urn and half of him's still left on the floor and nobody's ever taken up a whole urn before, not even the football player who keeled over in practice, so they can't figure out why and then they remember that the new guy smoked the last one and forgot to sweep him up before they dumped the fresh one and they got the two mixed up, and I really mean mixed up. So they just figure they'll go halves on each but they fill up another urn and there's still some left and they run out of fucking urns to boot so they sweep the poor bastards into a Dixie cup and pack them up for delivery. Aunt Bertie hops in the hearse and heads down the freeway to deliver the "sacred remains"—that's what she always calls them—to the "bereaved". Well, she gets going on the freeway and it's hot so she rolls down the window because she's too fucking cheap to fix the air conditioner in the piece of shit and the wind blows the "sacred remains" all over Hell's half acre and some of them blow in her eye and she almost cracks up the stiff wagon. So she pulls over and picks the "sacred remains" out of her eye and knocks the Dixie cup over and I'm thinking how fucking long can this go on? Well, now she gets real dramatic because she's supposed to deliver all the remains and half of them are in the floor mat and in her eye and out the window on the freeway and she can't figure out what to tell the "bereaved". So I ask why she don't throw the goddam cup away and give everybody a full urn and tell them how amazing it is that the sacred remains filled up a whole urn and she says she can't do that and I ask her what are they going to say, "Where the hell's the rest of the sacred remains?" like

these people are big into sacred remains and know that dear old uncle Al was definitely an urn-and-a-half type of guy.

Well she gets all pissed like I'm some kind of heathen Turk who couldn't give a shit about "spiritual matters" and says that if I ain't interested I can leave. So I turn tail and Mother tells me to get back and listen to the rest of the story, so they're real happy and I've got to sit through the rest of the sacred remains. Well, she goes on how she personally takes the sacred remains to the bereaved and explains that an unfortunate happening happened because she don't have the good sense to mix up her nouns and verbs a little and tells them that part of Uncle Al lies adrift in the wind. And they start to get a little pissed and the old man thinks it's kind of like dismembering somebody and Bertie's treading water because they ain't buying the part-of-Nature routine and she figures she better come up with something quick because the old lady's starting to jaw too and Bertie says that such occurrences occur frequently and I'm wincing at that one too and she says that for just such an occasion and I'm thinking she sounds like Foghorn Leghorn, they keep insurance to insure against such catastrophic catastrophes and says the insurance amounts to precisely the amount of the charges to charbroil dear old Uncle Al.

And I swear to God I'm looking around for a blunt object.

Well I look at the clock and I almost convert right there because it's time to go to work and I figure it must be a miracle because nothing this good ever happens to me. And I excuse myself just at the part where she's got the Highway Patrol out combing the brush for Al's lost remains and Mom frowns at me but I get out anyway. I relieve this guy at five o'clock and he tells me that it's been a wild one because some old bag lady decided to strip right in front of the bookstore and

picks our picture window to lean on and a couple of customers swear they'll never come in again. Well he takes off and some old bat comes in wanting to sell me some used books. So I go out back to take a look at them and she opens up the trunk of the car and she's got these mildewed Harlequins all over and wants to know how much I'll give her. So I try to be real polite just in case she's a plant who's related to the owner and tell her that I'm real sorry but I can't buy her books because I can't sell them. And she looks me right in the eye and then in the store and then back at me and says, "But you've got all those in there you haven't sold." And I swear on Dillinger's dick that there's not one fucking thing I can say to her so I give her five bucks out of my own pocket and tell her to put them in the big green storage bin in the alley.