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The hufty-tufty pitchkettled nose of wax meets
Tom Timbershiver

by Nick Barrett

Most of us only have one story to tell. This is mine. I am dead as it begins, which I think was the day I found myself inexplicably walking up the driveway to the old country pile that I would discover was called Manderlay Manor. I felt dazed and confused and didn't know I was dead at the time, but I won't trouble with you with all the long and convoluted thinking that finally led me to realise it.

I had help in reaching my realisation inside Manderlay. It was sunny that first day. A few people wandered around but I thought it best to go into the house to ask someone where I was or what I might be doing there. I walked through an arched opening, whose large studded oak door was lying open, into a large and gloomy, quiet hall.

Through the gloom I noticed a small figure curled up in an unlikely position on the bannister of a spiralling staircase, with its back turned to me. Not much could be seen clearly but it seemed to be a man, short, stockily built, dressed in what looked like rags made from old sacks. Probably from some maedieval reenactment event I supposed.

Excuse me, I called out as I approached. The figure suddenly spun around to face me, jumping to his feet at the same time and sending the most massive glob of spit straight towards my face. I recoiled, shutting my eyes protectively, certain I couldn't avoid this spinning green blob, but miss me it did.

“You see me?” he said, “you’re not alive then?”

I couldn’t string any words together to answer. He jumped down off the bannister and came towards me. He looked more like a gargoyle than a man. His face was as ruddy as his clothing seemed filthy, as though he slept in ditches or under hedges. “You see me?” he shouted into my face. Again I recoiled, expecting stinking breath or some malodorous bodily stench to match the face and clothes. Again, nothing.

“Yes of course I see you, why wouldn’t I?”

That set him off laughing. “You still don’t know,” he said. Two women entered and walked across the hall, looking at paintings and sculptures. “Watch this,” he said, jumping back on the banister and running up it somehow to a landing, about 20 feet up.

The women passed directly under his position as I spoke to them: “Excuse me,” I said, and then looking up I saw him take what appeared to be his penis in his hand and send a stream of urine arcing towards their heads. “Look out,” I shouted, running towards them to push them out of the way. I needn’t have. They neither saw or felt me or him nor the stream of urine that seemed to have left no trace.

He was laughing uproariously now. “Listen,” he shouted, turning round and dropping his pants, emitting the loudest explosion of its type I ever heard. Still no reaction from the women who by now had safely and apparently obliviously reached the other side of the hall.

“None of them see us or hear us and we cant touch them nor them us. You’re the first to be able to see or talk to Tom Timbershiver in many a long year.”

Some of the living can sense us he told me, a few sensitive types like the women in uniforms who stayed here during what sounded like WW2, although details like this I was to learn were of no interest to him. Nor was much else. He stayed beside me while I explored the building and grounds that we couldn’t find any way out of, trying to speak to the dozen or so people we passed, visitors they looked like, with no result.

He kept up his despicable behaviour towards those we passed, spitting, shouting and belching in their faces, sticking his head up the women’s skirts, baring his backside at them, peeing over heads or into open handbags, whatever amused him. I told him frequently to cut it out but he only laughed louder. Spouting rambling gibberish was how he preferred to spend his days, and nights.

“Is there a village nearby,” I asked. “Got no idea,” he said. “I can’t even get to the end of that path you probably came up, probably you can’t either. None of the others did.”

“What others?”

“There’s some were here before me but they’ve gone now, some were proper hufty-

tufty, pitchkettled wind-suckers when they arrived, then they just weren't there all of a sudden. Mayhap I'll go like that now you're here." "How long have you been here?"

"The King was called Richard and he buggered off to the Holy Land a few years before I turned up in here. How long ago was that? No account anyways."

The realisation of my death slowly seeped into what I still felt were my bones and grew cold there. The icy chill spreading over my entire being - if I still had a being - felt like it would never leave; how could it? This is what dead feels like then, living in an ice box. Not living though.

This must be heaven, or hell, or purgatory, or limbo, or perhaps some other holding area that I could be stuck in for all time. I wondered how the passage of time would feel. What would be worse, stuck here with this despicable moron or left on my own as he had been?

"Do you know if this is heaven or hell," I asked him, with no expectation of even a semi sensible reply.

"It's heaven to me; no idea what it'll be for you," he said. "Life was no fun. Hope you didn't die hungry like some did, you'll stay that way. No bellytimber for us here.

"Had a hungry looking fellow here once, spoke a lot, mostly old cods bollocks like you, but I remember he said: 'We are all authors of our own stories.' Said we ought to be careful then who we choose for characters. Must have been proper pitchkettled to have written himself in here then."

"Our stories are over," I said, "so probably it doesn't matter who we choose, even if we could."

"Mine's not over, I'm still here. Don't think I'd have chosen a dull nose of wax like you in my story though," he said.

My story isn't over then, I realised. I know there must be some way to tell my story to more than Tom. I expect to have time to find it.

Some word explanations:

1. Hufty-tufty: a braggart
2. Pitchkettled: puzzled
- 3) Windsucker: jealous person
- 4) Bellytimber: food
- 5) Kissing the hare's foot: living on scraps, or not eating
- 6) Nose of wax: a fickle person