

Dreaming Robot Monster

Boy, was that a dream, or was it!
-Johnny, protagonist of ROBOT MONSTER

PROLOGUE

ROBOT MONSTER: A guy in a gorilla suit and diving helmet portrays Ro-Man, who has come from outer space (or possibly our moon) to destroy all the inhabitants of Earth. Film critic Leonard Maltin described the 1953 film as “one of the genuine legends of Hollywood; embarrassingly, hilariously awful.” It was directed by Phil Tucker, with a screenplay by Wyott Ordnung.

I saw ROBOT MONSTER in 1954 when it was shown in 3D at the Alex Theater on Madison Street in Chicago. It scared hell out of me.

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OUR CAST

JOHNNY: Eight years old. Slap him a good one and Child Welfare won't call it abuse.

CARLA: Johnny's younger sister, five or six years of premeditated cuteness.

ALICE: Johnny's older sister. Stacked. When she becomes a scientist in Johnny's dream, you don't buy it. Not with a rack like



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that.

MOM: Mom has problems not even hinted at in the film. (When the films of all of our lives are produced, I think this will also be said of us.)

THE PROFESSOR: *Claims* to be an archaeologist. Commie? Note the accent.

ROY: THE PROFESSOR'S assistant. Quite good looking. *Too* good looking, if you catch my drift.

RO-MAN: Space Alien from the planet Ro-Man, according to Johnny.

THE GREAT GUIDANCE: Ro-man's boss, leader of the Ro-men. As seen on television.

««—»»

ALICE

Robot Monster was not a robot. That is a misconception. That was the name Johnny, my obnox little brother, gave him, or really, what Johnny called the story.

ROBOT MONSTER! Credits roll over a background of violent science-fiction and gruesome and subversive horror comic books. Once every kid in the United states read comic books. Good kids read *Archie* and *Little Lulu* and *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories*. Then there were the rest of us.

This explains a great deal.

Oh, he was not of our world. He was *Ro*-man, not *Human* – but he was *not* a monster.
He wasn't.





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I know.

Alice sighs.

Robot Monster was my brother's dream.

But what of me? Have I no dreams?

I am 11 years older. Do my dreams matter less than those of a juvenile delinquent and socially warped OBNOX of an eight year old boy?

ONE

JOHNNY

Alice is smart, okay, reading books all the time. She's got big torpedoes and I don't care what she thinks, she is NOT the boss of me. I know Alice kissed Sidney Gerstein behind the garage. Sidney's a Jew with glasses and he's a sissy. The Italian guys three blocks over beat him up all the time. That's the kind of guy my sister kisses. A creep.

I tried to tell Mom about Alice and sissy Sidney, but, well, Mom is strange. She never gets mad, not really. You ask Mom "How are you?" and she maybe says, "Hello" or "Tuesday" or "That's just fine." Mom, to tell the truth, is Weirdsville. Not Daffy Duck Weirdsville or Clarabelle Clown Weirdsville. Quiet Weirdiville. Very strange.

Some of the kids at Christ the Comforter say Mom is "like from outer space, man," and then they snap their fingers like beatniks and laugh. Bastards. Alice the Smart says I have to just ignore those "dolts who cannot appreciate or comprehend divergent thinking." Yeah, that's some kind of big tickle, all right. Alice is as full of good advice as a prune is full of pruneiness.

Smarty-smart Alice was not around when everything got started. It was me and Carla. I had my space helmet and Carla had her stupid doll.

(Robot monster got Carla, but that's later. It bothers me. Carla really wasn't all too bad. I don't know what happened to her doll.)

So we were out playing. Mom and Alice had taken us on a picnic somewhere you could call the Valley of Bad Shaped Rocks.



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It was the kind of place you go on picnics when you're dreaming crazy stuff.

We spread out this itchy old green army blanket on a place that didn't have any big rocks and was only a little bit lumpy. Mom said Dad brought the blanket home from the army. I know Dad was a soldier. Once he let me play with a cigar box full of ribbons and medals. They were neat. Then Dad started to cry for no reason and he hugged me and he didn't say anything and I said, "Men don't cry," and he said, "Jesus wept," which is what you figure one of the nuns at Christ the Comforter would say. Then Dad wrapped his long, long arms around me, and he told me to be quiet, just be quiet, and he said he loved me very much. Then he did his Mr. Monkey face with his lips all pooched out and eyes bugging and made the ape sound that's pretty funny even if doesn't sound too much like an ape.

Dad is dead now.

Mom made the usual for the picnic. Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Baloney sandwiches. We had Kool-aid. Kool-aid's cheaper than soda. Kool-aid even tastes cheap.

Some fucking picnic, huh?

So then Carla and I go exploring, I guess you could call it, and I have my Captain Cosmos space helmet and my Zeta12 ray gun that shoots bubbles. Most of the kids at Christ the Comforter want to be cowboys like Hopalong Cassidy or Gene Autry or Roy Rogers. Cowboys are okay or even cool, is what the nuns think, and Sister Mary Loyola is always telling us about how she went to the Catholic Charities Hour radio show in New York and saw Bing Crosby, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, and Singing Cowboy Bob Atcher. This kid, Billy Svoboda, said he wanted to be Dale Evans and Mother Cordelia smacked him.

I don't know why nuns hate spacemen, but they do. Sometimes I think Jesus was a spaceman who landed here and got all messed up. Next time Jesus comes, He better bring an atomic ray gun.

The Valley of Bad Shaped rocks is bad news for picnics, but it's real good for SPACEMAN because it looks like Mars or some other outer space planet.

Of course Carla wants to play HOUSE.

I tell her no and shut up.

She goes snuffle-snuffle and I'm not sure if she is going to cry



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or if it's asthma because she's coming down with a rock allergy or something. She yaps some more that we have to play HOUSE.

I tell her to cast an eyeball on all the neat rocks. Cool, huh?

Carla says if I don't play HOUSE she will tell about that time in the bath tub.

I shoot some Zeta12 ray gun bubbles POP right in her eye and she yells and makes like she's going to cry but I tell her she better not so she doesn't but she tells me she hates me and I tell her ask me if I care. (Because I DON'T care. I don't care if everyone hates me. They can all go to hell, but first, let them just take one little minute to KISS my ASS!)

That's when we meet Roy and The Professor. They're at the entrance to a cave, chipping away at rocks.

Roy is young and he's got dynamic tension muscles like Charles Atlas (Charles ASSLESS, that's a joke) but Roy's hair is greasy-curly like he gave himself a Toni perm like a lady. Roy is pretty va-va-voom – if you can say that about a man.

The Professor is saggy with a turkey neck and turkey eyes. (What a turkey!) He turns into my dad (but that's later). He talks in a funny way that's like English but with something stuck on his back teeth and his throat. The way he sounds, well, he sounds like a Red. (But my dad, my real dad, wasn't any Commie.)

I tell them I want to blast them with my Zeta12. You can see they both think I'm just one cute little tyke, a regular little rascal, aw shucks, the bastards. The Professor tosses me this jive about Roy and him: "... archaeologists":

People who try to find out what men were like way back before they could read or write. Then he tells me, wouldn't it be nicer if we could live at peace with each other?

Pinko, what'd I tell you? Uh-huh, that's Bolshevik boushwah. Commie prick.

(You go to Catholic school, by the time you're second grade with Sister Mary Loyola, you learn all about the Red Menace. They don't always have Jewish names, either. Communists hate Catholics. Communists torture priests and rape nuns and kill little kids before their first communion. Then kids go to Limbo because of the fucking Communists. That's how it works.)

Then Mom and Alice show up. You can never know if Mom's upset. It's usually like someone's gone over her brain with John-





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son's wax (Stay tuned for "The Mom from Outer Space" on the same channel!), but Alice is definitely bent out of shape, because ... Carla and I were supposed to take a NAP right after lunch!

(See what I mean about this picnic? A NAP? Give me a break.)

Roy gives Alice the once-over and then the twice over. Maybe he likes her. Or maybe he's worried she's prettier than he is.

Then, or in just a little bit, Ro-man destroys the earth – pretty much, anyway.

TWO

MOM

Before I drowned, when I was a little girl, I was really quite wild. Yes, I was. It was like my mind was carbonated, filled with this frantic loud and wet buzzing that spread downward, made me vibrate and tingle with wicked energy. And grownups would speak to me, they would always tell me what to do, and I would maybe not quite understand, maybe, I don't know why, but I would maybe get the *idea* of what they were telling me to do – and then I would *buzz-buzz-buzz* not do it and would instead *buzz-buzz-buzz* do the direct opposite, if there was a direct opposite, and if not, I might do something slantwise or catty-corner or at the least, different.

Go to bed now, Mother said, and I took the box of kitchen matches and set the bed on fire and got so close to it that my hair burned. It made a sound that I can think of sometimes but cannot quite hear.

I would sing a song backwards and very loud then, if Uncle Peter or someone asked me to stop, I would start screaming and I could not even stop myself from screaming until I hit someone or bit myself.

Once I tore all the shades from the windows because the spring rollers made this twangy noise that made me laugh and my father picked me up and slapped me on the legs and shoulders and the back of my head all the way down the hall and threw me into the front closet and locked it and I ripped all the clothes from the hangers and peed on the whole pile with that twanging noise





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inside my head inside my head inside my head.

But then one day we went on a picnic. I still like picnics very much. If you ask me to go on a picnic, why, I will make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and I will make baloney sandwiches and I will fill Thermos bottles with Cherry Kool-aid and Grape Kool-aid and Orange Kool-aid and we will just go on a picnic, that is what.

The picnic when I drowned was a picnic with my mother and father and Uncle Peter and Aunt Alma and all my cousins and there was beer and a portable radio with Hank Williams and softball and sweet humming mosquitoes and the smell of Lucky Strikes. Then I went down to the lake with my cousins and the next thing that happened was I was in the water.

I went down and down in the water.

I went down slowly. Even though the feeling of slowness was new to me, not part of my life, not the way I was, I was not scared. It was cool and silent and soft in the water and everything seemed to wave all around me, waving silently, and I kept my eyes open and I could look right up through the water and see the sun and almost see worlds far off and after a while the sun froze and everything in my mind froze.

And I thought, *I like this. I like this and this is the way it should be.* I heard a nice sound way far away and it was the slow-stretched sound of the steel guitar on the portable radio. I did not hear Hank Williams and The Drifting Cowboys, just the steel guitar.

I drowned, that's what everyone said. And when they took me out of the lake, and I opened my eyes, and someone yelled, "Jesus saved her," and it was like everything in the world was just light and as perfect as it should be, so I thought maybe Jesus did save me, which is what a Savior would do.

I was not wild any longer. I was slow. I could feel the spaces in between deciding to do something, like waving hello, or blowing my nose, or turning on the radio, and my actually doing it. I could feel spaces when people said something to me and then I answered them. Or maybe I answered a question they had asked before, sometimes a long time before.

I liked being the way I was, the new way.

I grew up.

Tom came along. He was quite a pleasant man and strong.





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He had very long arms and fuzzy black eyebrows. He walked with a stoop and his long arms hanging. Once he told me when he was a boy other children used to call him “Monkey Boy.” He said he used to make himself laugh at them and tell them they were wrong. He was no “Monkey Boy,” he was *Mr. Monkey*, and then he’d make this sound like he was a man and an ape.

This is what Tom said to me: “You used to be a nervous girl. But now you’re not nervous. You’re all peaceful. Sometimes you’re so peaceful that people do not take the least notice of you.”

“Oh,” I said.

“I notice you,” Tom said.

Maybe it was sometime later, he asked, “Are you lonely?”

“I don’t know,” I said.

“I think you are lonely,” Tom said.

“All right.”

“What if I marry you?” Tom said. “How would that be? You wouldn’t be lonely then.” Then he smiled. “Mr. Monkey won’t be lonely either. Maybe you can teach Mr. Monkey how to be peaceful.”

Well, I did marry him. We had Alice and then Johnny and then Carla.

What happened next was Tom went away to be a soldier.

Then he came back.

He was different. He said he had to cry sometimes. He said he had too many bad pictures always running in his head. He said he wanted to really be a monkey and he not a person because people did terrible things to each other, just terrible things, and he said he needed me to hold him and bring him peacefulness and I did.

Then Tom died. One day, when he woke up, he started to cough. He said he was not worried. He said nobody ever died of a cough. But he did die of a cough, you could say, but it wasn’t on the day the cough started. It was later.

After Tom died, I got a job at Bell and Howell as “projector tester.” (*Projector Tester* are words you can say over and over in your mind, aren’t they, like a sweet lullaby about colors or something that tastes very good. They are slow words. I think they may be words that come from outer space.)

Projector Tester is a good job. You have to give new Bell and Howell projectors a three-minute test. If you turn them on and



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the bulb doesn't pop right away and you can show your film all the way through, then the Quality Control department will certify the projection lamp for a year. If a bulb is going to go, it goes quick: POP! That is how people should die, I think, only not with the POP!

So here is what I do. I line up 12 just manufactured 8mm projectors on the test table. Then I plug them in to the 12 outlet silver metal electrical outlet strip. Next I click a little reel of film on the upper spindle of each machine. It's the three-inch reel with 50 feet of film. On our newest model, the top-of-the-line Bell and Howell 8mm Lumina, the threading of the film is fully automatic and you never have to touch the film or the filmgate. You put the film's leader here and *zip-click-click*, the film is automatically threaded!

The 8mm Bell and Howell Lumina also features a retractable power cord and full auto-focus. It is quite a good movie projector.

The test movies are all samples from Castle Films, Inc. (I am sorry, you will not get a sample film with the purchase of the 8mm Bell and Howell Lumina projector. If you wish to purchase Castle films, they are sold at camera stores or may be ordered from the Castle Film Catalog.)

Castle films run three minutes each. I like that. In three minutes, you get the whole story. Some Castle films are in color, cartoons like Woody Woodpecker in *Fowled up Falcon* or travel films like *Hawaii: Enchanted Isle* (#9138), and some are in black and white, like the Abbot and Costello films (these are very funny three minute movies and I think I would laugh very hard at them but when I start to laugh, why, I sometimes think Lou Costello reminds me of someone and I get to thinking about who and so I don't laugh after all), and *Chimp's Last Chance* (#855). There are many Castle films about chimps and apes and gorillas: I think it was Tom who told me that chimps and apes and gorillas are not the same except for apes and gorillas.

There is one three-minute Castle film called *Mysterious Dr. Satan*. In it, the hero is the Copperhead and he wears a mask and fights a robot. It was so interesting I even told Johnny about it but I do not think he understood.

When I click the master switch all the projectors show all the movies together on the wall (except for the 8mm Lumina pro-



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jection lamps that go POP) and Abbot and Costello meet Chilly Willy and there's the chimps and Coney Island and The Three Little Bruins and Audie Murphy and W C Fields and a robot and Lon Chaney the Man-Made monster. It's like a stew of movies on the wall.

Projectors with popped bulbs I put on the FAILED shelf and the rest I pack up and put on the three-tiered cart.

That is what my job is, and now that you know, why, you see why I felt bad I had to take half a day off when the school called about Johnny.

This time it was not just a note home. Mother Cordelia said the school needed to talk to me and that meant she needed to talk to me.

So on Tuesday, I put on my hat and gloves and went to school. Christ the Comforter is a very good school with statues and pictures and flags. Mother Cordelia is principal. When she talks to me, she turns her head in a way that makes me think she will just keep turning it and turning it and it will go around and around and around. "Johnny runs up to the other students and blasts them in the face with bubbles." Mother Cordelia laughs but I don't because Mother Cordelia doesn't look like anything is funny. Laughing is not always about funny. "I guess you could say he's forever blowing bubbles," Mother Cordelia says, "but he's shooting them from that toy, that ray gun."

"Oh," I say. "Well. Then. Yes." That is the kind of thing I say when I need to put words out there but cannot be certain of what to say. It is strange, almost like being underwater, or getting secret messages from outer space, but just then, I can see in my mind Chilly Willy and gorillas and bubbles of light going pop-pop-POP!

Mother Cordelia says when Johnny "blows bubbles at the other children, he yells he is CAPTAIN RAMJET of THE ROCKET REBELS and he will destroy them all with his bubbles of death. We do not like children to make this sort of threat, even playfully. And, frankly, I do not think Johnny is all that playful."

I tell Mother Cordelia Johnny has no father.

"But Johnny has a Father." She points to the Crucifix on the wall by the window. She says, "Johnny's Eternal Father is always with him. Our Father who art in heaven."





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I nod my head. *Woody Woodpecker. Mighty Mouse. Fatso Bear. Chimp on the Farm.*

"It's the comic books," Mother Cordelia tells me. "Johnny is obsessed by comic books."

These are Johnny's comic books: OUTER SPACE INVADERS. BEYOND THE GALAXY. DARK DIMENSION 12X. SPACE MONSTERS. BUZZ COREY. ATOMIC MENACE. CAPTAIN RAMJET OF THE ROCKET REBELS. ROGUE STAR. FLASH GORDON. PIRATES OF THE STRATOSPHERE. ROD BROWN OF THE ROCKET RANGERS.

"You must take the comics away from him," Mother Cordelia says. "Get him away from the comic books."

"All right," I tell her.

"No more comic books," Mother Cordelia says, "because you know what is good for him and right."

"Yes," I say. *Chilly Willy is so silly and now the Mt. Everest Woodpeckers return on the Gorilla Show ...*

"I further advise," says Mother Cordelia, "that you have a serious talk with him and then give him ... You. Know. What."

"All right," I say.

"And I advise still further that you give it to him right on the ... You. Know. Where." Now Mother Cordelia smiles.

"All right," I say.

"I am sure ... You. Know. How." Now Mother Cordelia winks.

I know what is right and good for my children. That evening, I tell Johnny and Carla that Alice I am taking them on a picnic.

I like picnics.

THREE

Ro-man set up headquarters and base of operations in a cave in the Valley of Bad Shaped Rocks. (Coincidentally, this was the exact cave site where Johnny and Carla had come upon The Professor and Roy practicing archaeology.) Though he was but a lone warrior, and a hairy one at that, Ro-man had been ordered to destroy all of humanity.

Check and double check, Ro was up for the gig. Ro-man was equipped with a Calcinator ray, a bubble machine, a Televisory





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Vidscreen and a card table. Wouldn't take much more than that. This was before the Star Wars missile defense system.

No declaration of intent, no cheeseball speeches like *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL*. Ro-man royally Japs the planet. Fired up the old Calcinator ray and, brother, that's all she wrote.

Reports via viewscreen that he has put the kibosh on the whole kit 'n' kaboodle. It's a wrap. Case closed, Mabel, and I'm coming home.

That's what Ro-man brags to The Great Guidance, who more or less tells Ro-man, "*Bubbe*, you are so full of prunes." Cram this into your noggin, Ro-man, there are *SIX PEOPLE* still alive on the planet so let's get calcinating."

Little did Ro-man know that Johnny had been spying, picking up on the two-way interplanetary gas session and bombast between the Great Guidance and Ro-man.

Johnny beat feet back to the ruined house: all that was left was the basement level. Strands of wire buzzing and crackling with electricity – a primitive but effective means of blocking Ro-man's Televisory Probes – surrounded the open air bunker of the last human beings on the plant, who were—

Pop: (who had *been* the Professor but ... Hey, change happens) and

Mom: (ding-dong ding-dong)

and

Carla (ain't she sweet?)

and

Roy, who was now the scientist boy-friend

of

Alice, who had become a scientist in her own right.

And of course ... Here's Johnny!

Johnny threw himself into the sanctuary and says, "I know where Ro-man is. Let's go and kill him."

Alice: Perhaps we *could* find his weak spot.

Mom: Do you think it will rain today? It could. I wish we had a roof. I don't think we have an umbrella and we are not fish.

Roy: Maybe it's ... his ass. We could jam some fissionable materials right up Ro-man's old wazoo ...





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Pop: Don't talk like that.

Alice: Roy, your levity is inappropriate. We are confronting certain death.

Roy: Oh ... Alice, will you marry me?

Carla: I thought you were already playing house.

Mom and Pop: Ha-ha.

It was agreed then. Alice and Roy, having in common both science and a penchant for kludgy banter, would wed.

Roy: ... we were wondering how you'd feel about performing the ceremony.

Pop/Professor: You want me to—?

Alice: Oh, yes!

Professor: In that case, let's do it! And I want you to know this is the biggest social event of the year! The whole darn town will turn out!

Pop/Professor is really a big tickle. Har-de-har-har. But okay, if Jackie Leonard he ain't, leave us not to forget he was the cat who, with the invaluable aid of scientists Roy and his own daughter Alice, invented an *ANTIBIOTIC SERUM* capable of curing all diseases, even the common cold.

And upon whom did he experiment with the first injections? Turn around, drop your pants, and a little *shtoch* in *tuchus* for his family and Roy and of course, Himself.

Interesting side effect, one which The Professor had no time to learn from FDA trials. *The antibiotic also provided complete immunization to Ro-man's death ray!*

Which fact gets glommed onto by ... Ro-man.

Ro-Man: Great Guidance, I have discovered the secret of our failure to destroy the remaining humans! Our Calcinator death ray cannot penetrate them. They have been made immune through the antibiotic serum, which I believe is the same as our formula X-Z-A.

The Great Guidance had new commands.





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Ro-Man: I am ordered to kill the humans. I must do it with my hands.

«««—»»»

Professor: Dearly beloved, we are gathered here to... Dear Lord, You know I am not trained for this job. But I have tried to live by your laws. The Ten Commandments ... The beatitudes... The Golden Rule.

I have always believed in the Brotherhood of Man. I have always believed that one day, the working peoples of the world would unite to throw off the yoke of Oppression. The working class is the class that works and thus, we, the last survivors, reach out to any other last survivors who might have survived in Russia.

(When you're a Red, you're a Red until you're dead.)

Professor: Father on high, I would like you to give your blessing to Alice and Roy. Even in this darkest hour, we have kept the faith. In your grand design, there may be no room for man's triumph over this particular evil that has beset us. If by any chance, we workers of the world emerge in strength and victory should be on our side, I want You to give a long life to Alice and Roy, and a fruitful one. But no matter how it ends, Lord, watch over them this night ... Watch over us all.

Amen.

And now, I pronounce you Man and Wife.

Roy, do you have the ring?

Roy: Why, I didn't think about that.

Johnny said, "Oh, brother." Johnny thought, *Stupid a-hole. Freamer supreme. And he's a swish.*

Mom took off her own ring and handed it to Roy. "Rings go





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around and around,” she said.

Roy: With this ring, I thee wed.

Professor: The only thing to seal it now is a kiss.

They kissed. Johnny asked, “Where are you going on your honeymoon, Niagara Falls?”

Roy (laughing): Lad, you are just chockful of scintillating wit. To tell the truth, we hadn’t thought about that.

Professor: Wherever you go – be careful. And I want you back first thing in the morning. After all, there is a war going on! And now, more than ever, I don’t want to give up!

Roy: Thanks for everything, Dad. Most of all, for having raised Alice. You too, Mom.

Alice: I’ll go get my things, and then we’ll go.

FOUR

ALICE

And so, heigh-ho and off I go, a’hand in hand, a’honeymooning with Roy, lah-de-dah, Roy, dunce-in-residence. “Alice,” says he, “we really need to talk.” A pause, then, “*I* need to talk.”

I’d wager a dollar to your Aunt Nellie’s discount diaphragm that Roy is struggling with a confession concerning the “love that dare not speak its name” – or even lisp it.

But why should I make it easy? “No, my dear, my darling, my one and only tutti-frutti. What we need is FORNICATION. The future of the human race depends on it. As soon as we find a little out of the way nook or cranny, you’re going to jam your beef bayonet into my yummy gummy and ride me like a carnival tilt-a-whirl. We are fucking for the future, Roy, a better bet than US Savings Bonds.”





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A sidelong glance shows me red-face Roy about to have a cow.

Do the dirty with Roy? Please, My Ain True Love is a Magnificence of Savagery and Intellect. He is Unpredictability and Contrasts. He is Cruelty and Confused Gentleness. Fate has brought him to me and me to him. He's one hotcha-hotcha and I'm totally gone for him. As Blaise Pascal said, "The heart has its reasons which reason knows not of." And as Dale Evans stated, "Every time we love, every time we give, it's Christmas."

So, Merry Christmas to me, as we continue on, Roy trying to talk and me following my unreasoning heart.

Then behind us, Carla calls out. "Roy, Alice, wait for me!" And we stop, turn, and here she comes, cutey-pie in Keds.

Alice: Carla, what are you doing here?

"I didn't get you any presents," Carla says with reach-for-the-insulin adorability, holding out a droopy flower.

"How lovely," Roy says sourly, perhaps thinking of his own pointdexter, likely to droop when summoned to report for duty.

Carla's following us was unexpected, all right, but perhaps it is better this way, I think, as I gush appropriately. "Oh, you little rascal! Thank you very much. Now, you'd better run right on home!"

Roy: Quickly, Carla.

Very good, fly away home, little birdbrain, fly away home.

FIVE

She runs and runs, puffs of dust trailing her. She is afraid now and she tries to think of things that will make her not afraid. Maybe Johnny will play house with her. Maybe Mom will sing her a song: "Chilly Willy cooked in a stew, with a penguin and a monkey and a girl like you." Of course, maybe she will be in bad trouble. Maybe Dad will be mad and yell and spank. Then for no reason she





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thinks, Maybe this is all a dream. Maybe she is drowning – little girls do drown – and in her drowning she is imagining this.

Suddenly, Ro-man blocks her path. Beneath his dull gray helmet, he has a broad and thick body like the hairiest of apes, although he stands easily erect, not even a hint that he'd feel more comfortable with knuckles on the ground. He looks like his feet hurt badly and you can tell he doesn't want to run because he is more the lumbering than the running type. Ro-man's face (what you can see of it through the misty none-too-clean glass visor of his helmet) is something like Lon Chaney's in *Phantom of the Opera*, if in addition to his other physiognomic misfortunes, the Phantom had been badly burned in a fire, or had decided to don two silk stockings to rob a currency exchange. Ro-man's space helmet sports one bent antenna and one straight one. Reception is pretty good, considering.

Ro-Man: What are you doing here alone, girl-child?

Carla (sans cuteness): My daddy won't let you hurt me.

Ro-Man: We will see!

It seems she was right to be afraid. She is neither drowning nor dreaming and she is in bad, bad trouble.

SIX

Ro-man contacts the Great Guidance on the Televisory Vid-screen. Ro-man's got plans. Ro-man's got dreams. Ro-man's gotta be cool and just mayhap, Mr. Ro-man, Esq. might have it made in the shade.

Ro-Man: Great Guidance, I have a favorable report. I have already eliminated one of them. It was a simple matter of ... strangulation. That leaves four for me to kill.

The Great Guidance: Error again! *Five*.

You can hear the Great Guidance's exasperation: *What's with*





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you, Schmuck? You're coming on like Goof Majorus. You a numbnuts or what?

Ro-Man: *Four*, well ... I have made an estimate in relation to our strategic reserve: The plan should include ONE LIVING HUMAN for reference, in case of unforeseen contingency.

The Great Guidance: Do you question the plan?

Ro-Man: No, Great One. I only postulate—

The Great Guidance implies, *Hold on just one chicken-pluckin' second! Oh, Ro-man, I'm tuning in and the picture is clear! You've gone APE for the female HUMAN, the one with the classy chassis and the out-sized nay-nays. 'Fess up, you got a case of the trottin' hots for the babe.*

Ro-Man: I ...

Great Guidance: Proceed on schedule! Destroy the others.
ALL OF THEM!

Ro-Man cuts the Vidscreen.

Ro-Man (goes all existential a la Hamlet's "to be or not to be," only with more hair and a space helmet: I cannot, and yet I must. How do you calculate that? At what point on the graph do must and cannot meet? Yet, I must.

But I cannot.

SEVEN

ALICE

Believe it or not, despite the rock strewn terrain, we found a small patch of grass, spread out the blanket, and then, just for the hell of it, I surprised Roy with a sudden and fierce kiss.

He did not surprise me in the least. He pulled back, wiping his





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lips with the back of his hand. "Alice ..."

I said, "Our obligation to the future generation is to create it, so let's get propagating."

"Yessss," Roy said super-sibilantly. "I take our responsibility seriously, but it will be difficult, because my natural inclinations ..."

"You're light in the shoes? You're a bigger fairy than Tinker Belle? You really love FRUIT cake and NANCY comics and JUDY GARLAND, too? Aw, you nutty nob jockey, you flying flit, you silly shirtlifter, you fucky-sucky Stoke on Trent, I knew you were a ragin' HOMO ever since I first saw you. There's as much chance of my making humpity-bumpers with you as there is my diddling Dwight D. Eisenhower in the window at Macy's during the Thanksgiving Day parade while Mamie farts 'Auld Lang Syne' in three quarter time."

Color Roy confused. "You don't love me?"

I smiled.

Enter ... *RO-MAN!*

Enter ... My Own True Love!

... who gave Roy such a *zetz* stars orbited his head like in a Woody Woodpecker cartoon. Ro-man said something along the lines of "Alice and I are going steady, pal, so you're cruisin' for a bruisin'"

Ro-man, my Romantic Ro-man!

So that's all she wrote, Roy. Off to the Great Fruit Stand in the Sky. As William Shakespeare had it, "Nothing in his life became him like the leaving it."

"C'mon, Big Guy," I said, and Ro-man picked me up in his great, long arms, My Big Loving Monkey Man, and held me tight against his powerful hairiness as he carried me off to our cave.

«««—»»»

It was easy to lure Mom, Pop, and the Obnox to the cave. Hello, Operator, get me the Televisory Vidscreen of the last remaining Humans on Earth. Ooh, ooh, Mommy, Poppy, the Big Bad Hairy Guy in the Helmet has your poor widdle Alice and I only just managed to get to this communicator while he's recalibrating and recalculating his recalculator. You've got to rescue me.





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And here they come. Mom going woo-woo, Pop singing the Internationale – and the Obnox. (*You tell me your dream/I'll tell you mine.*)

And when they're at the mouth of the cave, Ro-man clunks Mom and Pop's heads together KA-THUNK! (*Nyuck-nyuck-nyuck, you hapless halfwits!*) Ro-man grabs Snotty Johnny by the googler and sets to squeezing.

Takes maybe five seconds, all in all. The three of them lie there, as dead as Adlai (Commie Symp) Stevenson's presidential plans.

And now, I, I and my Strange and Wondrous Love, can begin, Adam and Eve, on this world that is ours and ours alone ...

EIGHT

THE GREAT GUIDANCE: You wish to be a human? Good, you can die a human!

The Great Guidance gestures. Lighting shoots from his fingers.

Zap!

Ro-man staggers and falls dead.

Nonplussed, Alice says, "Shit."

NINE

ROBOT MONSTER, DREAMING

Though in many aspects the Anthropoid Ape resembles the Lowland and Mountain Gorillas of Africa, there are marked differences originally noted and recorded by enlightened zoologists of the mid-19th century. The true Anthropoid weighs less than and is not as stocky as his evolutionary underling, the Gorilla. An Anthropoid walks fully erect with no knuckle-dragging and considerably more grace and poise, has a rudimentary but practical language consisting mainly of noun and verbs, and by any measur-





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able scale, is of far greater intelligence than your average maggot-eating, shit-flinging ape.

Which is to say that in their natural habitat and conditions, gorillas are fucking morons and Anthropoid Apes are merely pitifully stupid. If this sounds judgmental, ah, mine is the right: It was my curse to be born Anthropoid. Indeed, from my entrance onto this Earthly plane, was I doubly cursed: Though all was proper for an anthropoid infant from my neck down, I was born with the face of a wrinkled, double-ugly infant human being.

Speculate as you will, and certainly as I often did, there is a simplistic legend among Anthropoids. Yes, now I know about Archetypes and Collective Unconscious and all that, but trust me; with your typical Anthropoid having at best a low double digit IQ, we are talking about a *super-simplistic* mythology:

Once, long ago, an orphan infant human boy was adopted into a tribe of Anthropoids and grew up to be *Tarmangani*: The Great White Ape. He learned from his extended foster family how to sleep safely in trees and flee the claws and fangs of Numa, the Lion, and to keep from being trampled by Tantor when the seasonal mating-madness came upon the tusked behemoth. On his own, he learned the use of a knife (my unimaginative clansmen refer to it as a “hand fang”) to read and write English, French, German and Spanish, and, for all I know, how to floss three times a day, use a Zippo lighter, and strum “Whispering” on the tenor banjo.

With smarts like that, Tarmangani soon established himself as King of the Apes. I would assume he suffered an epiphany one day: *I am Ruler of this bunch of hairy, stinky shitheads? I am dying for good conversation, for a seven course meal that includes no fruits, leaves, shoots or grubs, for a dance with a non-hirsute someone of the opposite sex who can waltz or polka rather than stomp around grunting and farting at the ceremonial Dum-Dum.*” Intellectually, Tar had gone far above his raising, and so can it be any surprise that he abandoned those who’d taken him in and given him food, shelter, and, on occasion, a backhanded smack to the chops?

It is whispered that Tarmangani will return one day. Myself, I don’t care if he does return in glory, riding a white ass through the jungle, while all the asshole anthropoids wave palm leaves and chant, “*Ben Gund Yud* (The Great Leader returns)! Hosanna in

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the highest! Now there'll be fat larvae in every pot! Huzzah, huzzah, huzzah!" Frankly, once my own brain cells were energized and making connections, putting two plus two together and working quadratic equations on the side, I couldn't buy it: Tarmangani would never come back to this. I sure as hell would not. Not while Howard Johnson's offers 31 flavors.

I mention the legend only as it's thinly conceivable that it supplies a clue as to how I came by my countenance. Genetically, anthropoids and humans are 99+% the same. It is not impossible, methinks thinks me, that Great White Ape grew tired of playing pat his own cake and held his nose long enough to plant his Tarmanganiness into an Anthropoid lass, maybe he got drunk, and then, recessive and dominant genes at work ...

Ah, why am I here? Why was I born? What the fuck? Such philosophical questions can and will be contemplated even unto the End Times – and if you come up with the definitive answer, I'll see you get your shot on The 64 Dollar Question.

I know only that I grew up with an ugly human face on top of my neck. Other little anthropoids called me "*Balu Ug Lot*," which translates "Little Baby Ass Face," and my own mother, Gloopit by name, used to wrinkle up her nose, nostrils as big as Oldsmobile headlights, and grunt most un-mommyish phrases.

I was outcast and exile. Oh, I maintained contact with my peers and their elders – my ass was frequently contacted by a foot of a playmate, my head, a fist – but I was the classic ugly duckling, the lonely little petunia in the onion patch, the matzoh ball in the Irish stew.

Until one day ... Fate intervened.

Fate! There is no fate. Between the thought and the success God is the only agent. Do you know who proclaimed that? Edward G. Bulwer-Lytton who created some of the worst prose in the English language, perhaps outdone only by his friend and crashing snob and bore Charles Dickens.

I can give you a thousand quotations, pertinent or impertinent. I can build a harpsichord and admirably perform upon it no fewer than 300 Bach Cantatas despite my having fingers like Polish sausage. If you need someone to offer critical thought on cave wall painters or Caillebotte, cite each season's batting average for Monte Stratton, or espouse a credible opinion on why Cyril



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and Methodius should not be credited with devising the Glagolitic alphabet, good sir, I am your huckleberry!

And how did this happen?

Why, one day in the skies overhead there was a eye searing flash and ear drum shattering explosion. And then, no more than a kilometer from us, an earth shaking impact.

“*Pandar pandar!*” yelled one another.

“*Zu tu!*” shouted another.

And of course, the obvious “*Kreeg Kreeg-gab!*”

“Loud, loud!” and “Big Bright!” and “Beware, danger, danger!” Such were the keen observations of my landsmen.

Please remember, I had not yet metamorphosed into the Einstein of the Anthropoids, but there was a brute force of curiosity within me that overcame my fear.

What had I to lose? My life? As Cesare Pavese has it: “No one ever lacks a good reason for suicide.” Human or Anthropoid, both species have an occasional and enviable bent for self-destruction.

Or perhaps I was yet too fucking stupid to know there might be danger involved.

With the cheerful encouragement of the tribe, “Numa will eat you if he can shut his eyes so he doesn’t have to look at you,” and “*Ngh amba wob at!*” (Don’t trip over your little bitty penis), I set off.

I found the wreckage of a flying saucer. (I of course did not know then it was any such thing.) I discovered a grayish dead body, non-anthropoid and *non-zan-mangani* If you are in the *mangani* family, you normally have five digits per hand. This little *pisber* had three. He also had big glassy eyes like some of the bugs I used to find pretty tasty.

And I found ... I did not know what it was, not then, but it was round and gray and like any babbling human toddler or most primitive mammals equipped with hands / paws, I had to try it on.

My head lights up like Coney Island. It is like I’m getting the extra A-Bomb they’d planned to drop on Tokyo if Hiroshima and Nagasaki didn’t do the trick.

Epistemological Instant! “What is knowledge?” “How do we know what we know?” “How is knowledge acquired?”

You don’t have to send in to the Rosicrucians, amigo. I can





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testify and proclaim without contradiction knowledge is acquired Just! Like! That! *Zappo-Bam! Bang! Pow! Zoom!* Maybe not the sum total of all Earthly knowledge and that of the worlds beyond, but a damned good bunch for a freeby was contained in the helmet I lowered down over my accursed ugliness (that's a literary allusion, bwah: Gaston Leroux's *Phantom of the Opera!*). I could untangle Tesla and find the Lost Chord, mesmerize the masses and perfect perpetual motion, and even proffer a koan spun off from the last words of Dutch Schultz: "A boy has never wept nor dashed a thousand kim."

Thus I became the intelligent anthropoid with the ugly human face.

I fear to remove the helmet. I do not think it would happen, but it is just possible I could revert to my pre-smart state. I could not bear that, to descend to once more being an obtuse pariah.

Because, while I am ever so solitary now, the only one of my kind upon this planet (uberanthropoid!), I dare to hope there are other beings – human beings – who may come to look upon me and discern only my mind ...

And if there is such a thing (the helmet does not impart any knowledge of the matter!) my SOUL!

O Joseph Carey Merrick, O Elephant Man, You of Hideous Visage and Victim of a Thousand upon a Thousand Torments, did you not at last find Kindness, did you not come to know Compassion, and to possess companions with whom you might laugh and weep and speak of the Pyramids and poetry and cabbages and kings and all things great and small?

I set forth upon my quest, and Joseph Carey Merrick, you are Inspiration and Companion.

Courage, Friend Merrick whispers, and I take courage, and *Hope*, Friend Merrick whispers, and I take hope

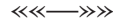
that
 my loneliness might reach out
 to touch the lonely
 those who carry their own sad and frozen
 exile within themselves
 that
 we will meet
 The Lonely





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that
we will come to know one another
that
we will love
that
we will love
that
we will love



Note: *Robot Monster* is in public domain and thus I have borrowed some lines of dialogue from the film. My thanks to writer Wyatt Ordnung, director Phil Tucker, and “N. A. Fischer Chemical Products” for the “Billion Bubble Machine.”

