

Roast

A Nightmare

by
Pete Barry

HARV, a stand-up comic somewhere between Gilbert Gottfried and Lewis Black, addresses the audience, regarding the MAN ON THE FLOOR, who struggles in a tightly-wound electric blanket.

HARV

I eat my steaks blackened. You can eat em bloody as you want, but remember this: the cows are out to getcha. Put a Tiajuana taco under a microscope, and it looks like downtown Los Angeles, overpopulated, chemical-laden, colorful, but not conducive to one's health. My leftist friends lobby for more humane treatment in the meat packing industries. They want keep the animals healthy. You know what? I'm a cow? Be my guest! Pump me full of ebola and smallpox. If I'm going out with a sledgehammer to the head, I'm taking you with me.

The Man drags himself along the floor by wriggling his torso. His legs and arms dangle limp and useless. He lifts up, then slumps down, over and over. Thump thump. Long rests in between.

HARV

Take a gander at this Darwin Award Nominee! Caught in the act of eliminating his incompetent sperm from the genetic pool! He's badly in need of a quadruple amputation. Useless, flopping limbs, struggling to the phone to save himself... Wait a second. Do I recognize that bland, wart-covered face, drenched with human stupidity? Oh, great. It's me.

MAN

Help! Hellllllp.

HARV

I guess there's no great shame in an idiot's life cut short. But I was planning to live for a hundred twenty five years. A nice round number. And not no keeling over, rotting sack o' meat senior, I tell you. I'm talking the kind three feet tall and driving around in the big Cadillac, running over motorcyclists and toddlers who don't move fast enough. Honk honk! Move it, sonny boy! You know how I lived to see a hundred and twenty? By NOT GETTING RUN OVER WHEN I WAS THREE YEARS OLD!

But I'll tell ya what, kiddo, this ain't gonna cut it. Done in by an electric blanket and a crooked landlord.

MAN

Please help I'm fucking dying!

HARV

A more graphic demonstration of the greenhouse effect you couldn't conjure up. I should have videotaped this and sent it to the Republican Party. Fight idiocy with incompetence! I'd have saved the world.

(Thump thump.)

For your information, Alanis Morrisette, this is irony. I spent half of New Year's Eve on the phone with the super, trying to make him consider turning on the heat in the building. According to him, his tenants never stay in for New Year's, so he turns off the heat to save a few pennies.

(Thump thump.)

Let's take this philosophical treatise one point at a time. Point One: New Year's Eve parties are excuses to get drunk enough to commit horrible ethical transgressions, so that you can promise to be a better person for the next three hundred and sixty four days. It's like Super-confession.

(Thump thump.)

Point Two: Unless your gas company is soaking you for six hundred dollars per gallon, killing the heat for one night ain't gonna send you to Reno, you fucking mathematically-innumerate pinchpenny.

MAN

Heeeelllllllp.

HARV

Point Three: and this is maybe the most important point. When somebody threatens you, say like this: "Turn on the heat or I'll fucking murder you in your sleep!" And you say, "I might believe that, if I thought you had the courage, Mr. Herman, to come out of your apartment during flu season," and - here's the key - and YOU'RE ABSOLUTELY CORRECT, I am a paranoid lunatic who's never gonna brave that filthy, lice-ridden hallway just for the satisfaction of throttling your dirty little neck - if all of this is true, why in the name of fuck's green earth WOULD YOU CAVE? Why would you then, two hours later, say, you know what? He's right. I'll turn up the heat. That's like winning sixty thousands dollars on a hand of blackjack, and then saying, "No, you know what? I was just kidding." Why would you do that?

But never mind, here's the upshot: I've cranked the heat to maximum, which does nothing, since the building heat's not on. I wrap myself in five blankets and push myself against the heater, trying to conduct every joule of heat energy that might float up into my body. I turn the stove on, that, at least, does something. (I'd stay in the kitchen, but it's five to three I'd light the fucking blankets on fire.) I'm wrapped up like a turducken enchilada in all these thick blankets, and then, just to be sure, I wrap an electric blanket around myself, and turn it up to the max. This brings my body temperature up to at least ice-cube weather, and soon, I'm shivering myself into a deep sleep.

And then, for no apparent reason, this fucking asshole landlord TURNS ON THE HEAT. Now, I've cranked it. Within thirty minutes, the room temperature shoots to a hundred. The stove is on, that adds another sixty degrees. And add in the electric blanket? I'm literally cooking, like a potato in aluminum foil on a campfire.

So now where are we? Is this an asshole I see before me? Come, let me kick you in the balls! Maybe it'd clear your head, if you had any feeling in them. The heat's so high they're hanging down to your knees now.

MAN

Shut the fuck up!

HARV

Hey, genius, you got your leg caught in the phone cord. Nice touch.

MAN

Shut up!

HARV

Was this not already difficult enough for you, Harry Houdini?

MAN

You're not funny.

HARV

Who needs funny? Take a look at you! I should sell tickets.

MAN

I'm dying!

HARV

Good riddance!

MAN

You'll die too, you fucking ghost!

HARV

(furious)

And what do you think I'm doing here, Harv? My name is Motivation. I'm your personal Yale coxswain, sitting on the bow of the skiff, yelling "stroke"!

MAN

You can stroke my coxswain.

HARV

Now we're talking! Get funny!

MAN

What's funny about this?

HARV

Death is hilarious. Violence makes everybody laugh. That's why the Muppets used to be the best. Socks with eyeballs beating the shit out of each other. The best routine ever: Daffy Duck. There was this one cartoon where Bugs Bunny is outsing him and outdancing him and outeverythinging him, and he says, fine, fuck it. He gets up in front of the audience, he drinks a gallon of gunpowder, lights a match, swallows it, and BLOWS RIGHT THE FUCK UP. He COMMITS SUICIDE right there on the stage. And the crowd goes nuts. And there's that sucker Bugs, he's gotta clap too, and he looks up to Daffy's ghost, floating up to heaven. And he says, OK pal, you win, that was the greatest routine ever committed to stage. And Daffy's ghost looks down, shakes his head, and says, "I know, I know, but I can only do it once."

A long moment of struggles. Thump thump. Thump thump. Thump thump.

HARV

See? You're motivated now. You motivated to shut me up, to shut off the noise.

MAN

Rrrrrrrrgggh.

HARV

Oh, shit. You know, that cord has now sunk into your leg. You're peeling the muscle off like a Thanksgiving turkey.

MAN

I want to live!

HARV

Not with a leg like that, you don't. You're not playing the Laugh Factory again, I'll tell you that, my friend.

MAN

I WANT TO LIVE!

HARV

Listen, Jimmy Stewart, nobody wants it worse than I do. But life ain't a free lunch, here. You want it? There's the phone! Nine-one-one awaits! Pull! PULL! Feel the burn!

MAN

Feel the burn? Oh, fuck you!

HARV

We'll get you brand new legs, like the bionic man! You'll see every doctor in the world! It'll be like Christmas!

Forget all that made-up-shit you used to take to your GP!
We'll get surgeons, accupuncturists, physical rehabilitation
specialists!

MAN

Rrrrmph!

HARV

Protologists! Female protologists! Three dozen hot female
proctologists! It's high time for you to pull your head out
of your ass, and have someone else stick theirs up it!

MAN

Fuck!

HARV

You're gonna make it! You're gonna finally have a reason to
go to the doctor that you didn't make up in your own fucking
mind! Get on that phone, call nine-one-one! Here come
doctors out of the woodwork! You'll be operated on for three
straight months! Flesh peeled away, replaced with shiny,
indestructible metal! You're be flayed open and put back
together! Have 'em take out the stomach while they're in
there! A new man! Made of steel! Bacteria resistant!
Forego this aging skin, this swollen meat! The first of a
new breed of supermen! Just PICK UP THAT FUCKING PHONE!

The Man has just made it to the phone
with his teeth. He pushes one more
time and knocks the receiver from its
cradle.

HARV

THAT'S IT! Now dial NINE!

The Man hits nine with his nose. A
soft beep.

HARV

ONE!

The Man pushes a little further to
reach one. Beep. The phone gets away
from him slightly.

HARV

Don't let it get away! One more number! ONE! ONE! ONE!

The Man lurches forward one more time
towards the phone.

The cord tied around his leg yanks the
plug out of the socket.

The Man begins to weep. Harv nearly has an apoplectic fit.

HARV

Oh, JESUS MARY AND JOSEPH you pulled out the goddamn phone cord! You stupid sonovabitch! OK, OK. No big deal. Turn around. Turn yourself around, go back to the wall socket. TAKE THE PHONE WITH YOU. Plug it in, you're fine.

MAN

No!

HARV

Don't give me that! This is it! You can't get back there, you're done. You got one shot at this.

MAN

I can't!

HARV

Whaddyou mean you can't? You want em to find you like this? In a worse position than David Carradine and Elvis combined?

MAN

I can't!

HARV

You can!

MAN

I won't!

HARV

You can! You just crawled all the way over here! You made it the entire length of the room! With only your head and neck! You just did it! You just proved you can do it!

MAN

I KNOW. I know.

The Man suddenly giggles, a horrific noise devoid of sanity.

MAN

But I can only do it once.

And he collapses into a coma.

Harv stares in shock and disbelief. Then, he deflates in rage and frustration.

He snaps his fingers.

Black.