

Brain Cheese Buffet



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Mr. Torso

Ol' Lud knew he was givin' 'em purpose by what he was doin'. This was God's work according ta the books he'd read, and Lud believed it might fierce, he did. *Yessiree*, he thought. *That's gettin' It*. He gandered cockeyed down at Miss August outa *Hustler*. As purdy a blondie as he'd ever seen. *Ooh, yeah* Awright, so sometimes it took awhile. Sometimes he had trouble gettin' the ol' crane ta rise, but jimmy Christmas, at sixty-one, what fella wouldn't ya know?

What'd these gals be doin' otherwise? *Gettin' diseases an' all, smokin' the drugs, gettin' cornholed by fellas*. 'Stead Lud was helpin' 'em ta be what The Man Upstairs intended 'em ta be, an' givin' ta those without what they'se wanted fierce. And acorse paid fer. Ya know?

Lud's mitt needed ta jack hisself up a tad longer 'fore he'd be able to get it, so's he stared on at Miss August, one mighty purdy splittail with that velvety lookin' snatch on her an' that dandy pair of ribmelons. Yessir!

But it wasn't that he was no preevert or nothin' by's doin' this everday. He was puttin' some real meanin' in these gal's lives, just like the books said. He was givin' 'em purpose.

Once he was able ta pull hisself a stiffer an' get to it he wondered what the gal in the August centerfold'd look like without any arms n' legs on her. *Problee not too good*, he reckoned.

But acorse sometimes God's work weren't purdy.

Tipps was contemplating the tenets of didactic Solipsism and its converse ideologies when he disembarked from his county car. *Positive teleology?* Tipps didn't buy it. It had to be subjectively existential. *It has to be*, he thought. *Any alternative is folly*.

County Technical Services looked like scarlet phantoms roving the darkness. Sirchie portable UV lamps glowed eerily purple. The techs wore red polyester utilities so that any accidental fiber fall wouldn't be confused as crime-scene residue by the Hair & Fibers crew back at Evidence Section. But Tipps, in his heather-gray Brooks Brothers suit already harbored a clear notion that TSD was wasting their time.

The moon shone like a pallid face above the cornfield. Tipps walked toward the ravine, where red and blue lights throbbed. Maybe, by now, these south county boys were getting used to it. A young sergeant rested on one knee with his face in his hands.

"Get up," Tipps ordered. "You're not a creamcake, you're a county police officer. Start acting like it"

The kid stood up and blinked hard.

"Another 64?" Tipps asked.

"Yes sir. It's another torso thing."

Mr. Torso, Tipps thought. That's what he'd come to think of the perp as. Fifteen sets of limbs dumped on county roads like this the past three years. And three torsos, all, white cauc feems. The perp yanked their teeth and did an acid job on their faces, hands, and feet. Tipps ordered up the new g/p runs on all the parts but thus far to no avail. K-Y jelly and sperm in the three torsos; the sperm typed A-pos. *Big deal*, Tipps thought.

"Down there, sir." The cop pointed into the lit ravine. "I sorry, I just can't hack it"

This is getting to be a hard county, Tipps told himself and descended toward TSD's lights. Techs crawled on hands and knees with flash-hats. Field spots had been erected; they were looking for tire indentations to cast. "Mr. Torso strikes again," Tipps muttered when he glanced further. At the culvert, two more techs were pulling severed arms and legs out of the pipe. Then a figure seemed to drift out of the eerie light Beck, the TSD field chief.

"So we got another torso job," Tipps said more than asked.

Beck, a woman, had thick glasses and frizzy black hair like a witch's. "Uh—huh," she replied. "Two arms, two legs. And another torso that doesn't match with the limbs. What's that total now? Four torsos?"

"Yeah," Tipps said. The torso lay off to the side, white slack breasts descending into its armpits. The stumps, like the others, looked healed over. The face was an acid scab.

"I'll know more once I get her in the shop, but I'm sure it's just like the others."

The others, Tipps reflected. The previous torsos had been crudely lobotomized, according to the deputy M.E. A hard pointed instrument thrust up through the left anterior eye socket. Eardrums punctured. Eyes glued shut. Mr. Torso was shutting down their senses. *Why?* Tipps wondered. "Do another g/p run," he said.

Beck half-smiled. "That's been a waste so far, Lieutenant. We're never gonna get a records match on a generic profile."

"Just do it," Tipps said.

Beck's sarcasm dissolved when she looked again to the ravine. "It's just so macabre. This is the sixteenth set of limbs he's dumped but only the fourth body. What the fuck is he

doing with bodies?"

Tipps saw her point. *And what in Gods name*, he thought, *is the purpose behind all this?* Tipps felt strangely assured of that. His philosophies itched. He knew there was a purpose.

Ol' Lud's purpose, acorse, was ta get the gals knocked up. Then he'd wait till they dropped their rugrat an' he'd sell it ta folks who couldn't have critters of their own. An' he wasn't profiteerin' neither--he'd use the green ta pay the bills and give the leftover ta charity. Nothin' wrong with that.

Acorse he had ta do the job on the gals first. Seemed only proper an' humane like, to relieve 'em of the mental turmoil. An' he'd cut off their arms an' gams so's they could get by on less viddles and so's he wouldn't hafta worry 'bout 'em gettin' away. Ol' Lud poked their ears 'cos it didn't seem right fer their jiggled brains ta be hearin' things an' gettin' all confused, and same fer gluin'up their eyes. These gals didn't need ta be seein' stuff.

And 'cos he felt for 'em, he jiggled up their brains a tad just like the way his daddy'd do years ago when some of the cows an' hogs got too feisty. See, all ya do is stick the carvin' awl up under a gal's eye socket till ya hear the bone break, then ya give the awl a quick jiggle. Wouldn't kill 'em, just messed up their brains so they couldn't think. "'Botomized 'em," daddy called it. Lud didn't need fer the gals ta be thinkin' things an' all. That'd be cruel seein' that they couldn't see or hear no how, an' couldn't walk no more or pick stuff up. Acorse, he had ta be careful doin' the jiggle. See, a coupla gals kicked on him after awhile, so's that's why Lud always disinfected the scratch awl now, so's no bad germs'd get up in their noggins. Yessir, Lud felt mighty bad about the four that died, but what could he do, ya know?

So he dumped 'em. Yanked out their pearly whites with a track wrench, an' burned up their kissers so's the cops couldn't recanize 'em and maybe figure out how he was nabbin' 'em.

Lud had 'em all rowed up in the basement, twelve of 'em. He'd lay each of 'em in a pig trough with one end cut out so's their lower parts'd kinda hang out over the edge. That ways all Lud had ta do was drop his drawers standin' right there when he gave 'em some peter and they could whiz an' poop without makin' a mess of thereselfs 'cuz Lud kept a milk bucket under each trough. He fed the gals three squares daily, good potatomash an' milk an' heathly stews 'cos he wanted nice *strong* critters ta sell. An' the gals could swaller 'n chew just fine 'cos Lud didn't pull their choppers unless they up an' croaked on him on account he seed on CNN one night 'bout how the coppers could 'denify dead folks by comparin' their teeth with dental records and some such.

Lud's routine was monthly. That's why he had twelve gals, ya know, one fer each month. Fer instance, right now it was August, so that's why he this very second had his peter in

the August gal. He'd give it to her 'least three times a day, ever day fer the whole month. That way it'd stand ta reason she'd be good an' preggered by the time September rolled around. Then aorse he'd start givin it to the gal in the September trough. An' when he wasn't dickin' em, or gettin' 'em viddles or washin' 'em up, he'd go upstairs and check out the city paper classified fer folks lookin' fer a critter to 'dopt. Lot of them folks was rich and they'd pay good scratch with no questions asked rather'n wait a coupla years ta get a critter legal like through the Adoption agencies. An' in his spare time, Lud'd kick back an' read his favorite books 'bout the meanin' of life an' all. He liked those books just fine, he did.

Only problem was the task of gettin' it on with the gals. See, sometimes it took awhile ta get his peter hard enough ta give 'em a good pokin' on account it was no easy thing fer *any* fella keep a stiffer when the gal was, like, ya know, didn't have no arms or gams. An' worse was the noises they made sometimes while Lud was tryin' ta get his nut, kinda mewlin' noises an' another noise like "gaaaaaa— gaaaaaaa" on account of 'cos Lud had jiggled their brains. Yessiree, downright unappealin' they was ta look at an' listen to which is why ol' Lud'd put one of the girlie center-folds on their bellies so's he had somethin' inspirin' ta look at whiles he was givin' 'em the wood.

Lotta times too he'd go limp right in 'em an' pop out, like right now with this red hairt gal in the August trough. "Dag dabbit!" he cursed 'cos Lud, see, he never took the Lord's name in vain. Couldn't get a nut out nowadays like that! So poor Lud stepped back from the trough with his pants around his ankles so's he could jack hisself back up but meantimes the K-Y in the gal's babyhole'd get gummy. See, 'fore Lud got ta dickin' a gal he'd have ta give them a squirt of the K-Y on account the gals couldn't get wet no more thereself 'cos of the brain-'jiggle he gave 'em. But like just was mentioned, see, that K-Y up there'd go gummy sometimes just like right now with this red-hairt gal, so's Lud'd have ta kneel down an' hock a lunger right smackdab on her snatch ta wet her up again, all the whiles he's jackin' his peter. It got a right frustratin' sometimes. "Ain't got all blammed day ta be beatin' my peter 'front of a torso!" he hollered aloud. "Jiminy Christmas! Can't keep a good stiffer, can't hardly come no more!" Aorse when such things happened ta cause Lud ta pitch a fit he'd let hisself calm down and get ta thinkin. Shore, it weren't easy sometimes, but this was God's work. He oughta be grateful—lotta fellas his age couldn't get a stiffer at all no more and they'se shore as heck couldn't have out with a nut. The books made it clear ta him. It was The Man Upstairs Hisself who'd called on him ta do this deed an' by golly there weren't no way he was gonna fail The Man Upstairs! His work weren't always easy, weren't supposed ta be.

So Lud gandered down real hard at that girlie centerfold of Miss August, pretendin' it was her in that there trough 'stead of this red-hairt gal with no arms or gams goin' "gaaaaa— gaaaaaa!" an' he was jackin' hisself real hard an' fast eyein' them purdy centerfold hooters and that nice paper cooze an—"Yeah, lordy!" he celebrated 'cos there his peter went finally gettin' hard again. "Yeah, oh yeah! Here she comes. August!" he promised an' just as ol' Lud'd have his nut he stuck his peter back inta that stump sided red-hairt snatch an' got a good load of his dicksnot right up theres in her baby-makin' parts.

"Gaaaaa! Gaaaaaaa!" went the gal's droolin' mouth.

"Yer quite welcome, missy," Lud replied.

Next morning Tipps' Guccis took him up to the city-district squad room where some newbies from south county vice swapped jokes.

"Hey, how's a torso play basketball?"

"How?"

"With difficulty!"

"Hey, guys, you know where a torso sleeps?"

"Where?"

"In a *trunk!*"

The explosion of laughter ceased when Tipps' shadow crossed the squad room floor. "Next guy I hear telling torso jokes gets transferred to district impound," was all he remarked, then moved to his office.

The sun in the window blinded him. Tipps didn't want the answers most cops wanted—he didn't give a shit. He didn't even care about justice. *Justice is only what the actualized self makes it*, he reflected. Tipps was obsessed with philosophy. He was forty-one, never married, had no friends. Nobody liked him, and he didn't like anybody, and that was the only aspect of his exterior life that he liked. He hated cops as much as he hated bad guys. He hated niggers, spics, slant-eyes. He hated pedophile rings and church coteries. He hated God and Satan and atheists, faith and disbelief, yuppies and bikers, homos, lezzies, the erotopathic and the celibate. He hated kikes, wops, and wasps. Especially wasps because he himself was born a wasp. He hated everybody and everything, because, somehow the nihilistic acknowledgment was all that kept him from feeling totally false. He hated falsehood.

He loved truth, and the philosophical calculations thereof. Truth, he believed, could only be derived via the self-assessment of the individual. For instance, there was no global *truth*. There was no political or societal *verity*. Only the truth of the separate individual against the terrascape of the universe. That's why Tipps had become a cop, because, further, it seemed that real truth could only be decrypted through the revelations of *purpose*, and such purpose was more thoroughly bared in the *spiritual* proximity to stress. Being a cop got him closer to the face that was the answer.

Fuck, he mused at his desk. He wanted to know the *purpose* of things, for it was the only way he'd ever discover *his* purpose. That's why the Mr. Torso case fascinated him. *If truth can only be defined on an individual stratum via one's conception of universal purpose, then what purpose is this? Tell me, Mr. Torso.*

It had to be unique. It had to be—

Brilliant, he considered. Mr. Torso was making effective efforts to avoid detection, which meant he was not pathological nor bipolar. The m.o. was identical, painstakingly so. Nor was Mr. Torso retrograde, schizoaffective, ritualized, or hallucinotic; if he were, the psych unit would've discerned that by now, and so would the Technical Services Division. *Mr. Torso*, Tipps thought. What purpose could there be behind the acts of such a man?

Tell me, Mr. Torso.

Tipps had to know.

Lud always 'ranged ta meet 'em out in the boonies, with phony plates on his pickup. Old lots, convenience stores an' the like.

"Oh thank God I can't believe it's true," yammered the blueblood lady when ol' Lud passed her the fresh, new critter. The critter made cute goo-goo sounds, its pudgy little brand-spankin' new fingers playin' with his new mommy's pearl necklace. She was crying she was so et up with happy. "Richard give him the money."

Lud scratched his crotch sittin' back there in the back seat of this fancified big lux sedan, one of them 'spensive kraut cars was what he thought. But the gray hairt guy in the suit gave Lud a bad look. Then, kinda hezzatatin' an' twitchy, this fella asked, "Could you, uh, tell us a little bit about the mother?"

She is a torso, ya dipstick, Lud thought. *An' it was my spunk preggered her up. But what 'choo care anyways? I got 'cha whatya wanted aint I? Jiminy Christmas, these rich folks!*

"I mean," the suit said "you're certain that this arrangement is consensual? I mean, the child wasn't. . . abducted or kidnaped or anything like that, right?"

"No way this critter here's kitnapped mister, so's you's got nothin' to worry about." Then Lud felt the fella could use a reminder.

"Acorse, no questions asked is what we agreeet, weren't it? Like ya said in yer ad, confederal. Now if yawl gots second thoughts, that's fine too. I'lls just take the little critter back and yawl can sign back up at the Adoption agency, 'acorse if ya don't mind waitin' like five er six years."

"Give him the money, Richard" the lady had out in a tone' a voice like the devil on a bad day. Women shore did have them some wrath now an' again. "Give him the money so we can take our baby home! And I mean right now, Richard, *right now?*"

"Er, yes," mouthed the new papa in the suit. "Yes, of course." And then he passed ol' Lud an envelope full 'o hunnert' dollar bills stuffed like ta the tune of twenty grand. Lud shot the folks a smile. "I just knows in my heart that yaw'll raise yer new critter fines an' proper. Don't ferget ta teach 'im ta say his prayers ever night an' make shore he's raised in the ways of The Man Upstairs now, ya hear?"

"We will," said the suit "Thank you."

"Thank you thank you!" gushed the new mommy all silly-face happy and teary eyed.

"You've made us very happy."

"Don't 'chall thanks me's much as The Man Upstairs," Lud said an' scooted outa the big lux kraut seedan parked at the QWIK-STOP. "*Cos it's Him that called me ta do this.*" After the rich folks left, Lud hisself drove off in his beat-ta-holy-hail pickup, thinkin'. He had work ta do tonight. What with that skinny-ass brownnyhead dyin' on him yesterday (Lud figured she musta got some bad germs up in her noggin when he jigg'd her brain, and that's why she didn't live long). He had to swipe hisself a new gal an' get her torsoed up "cos the June trough was empty now. Acorse, 'fore he did that he figured he best git home ta that red-hairt August gal ta lay some afternoon peter on her, get some *good* spunk up her hole. After all, Lud had future orders now, and it didn't seem fit ta hafta keep God's work waitin'. An' he also knew, from his fave-urt books, that The Man Upstairs kept his mitts off the world itself, ever since Eve put her choppers ta that apple, so's there was physerology in play too, which was why ol' Lud knew he hadda get his dicksnot up the girl's hole many times a day as he could manage so's she'd be shore ta get preggered up just fine.

And bring new life unto the world.

Tipps wore the morgue's ghastly fluorescent light like a pallor; he could've passed for a well-dressed corpse himself, here in such company. Jan Beck, the TSD field chief, set a bottle of Snapple Raspberry Iced Tea on a Vision Series II blood-gas analyzer. "Be with you in a minute, sir," she offered, matching source-spectrums to the field indexes. Tipps wondered how she applied her own notions of truth to her overall assessment of human purpose. Did she *have* such an assessment? She histologized brains for a living, autopsied children, and had probably seen more guts than a fishmarket dumpster. *What is your truth?* he wondered.

"Your man wears size-11 shoes."