

The Bjorn Idiosyncrasy

By Mark VanTassel

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"What?" B asked.

"This is stupid, B. We should go home. Normal people are sleeping now." I glanced at the headlights of a passing car, blinding myself.

"Who cares what normal people are doing," B said.

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corner, headlights flashing over a man beside me. I tried to leap away, but my feet tangled around themselves, even as my brain told me it was just the wooden Indian in front of the tobacco shop. At least in the darkness no one could see me fall.

"If you can't keep up, I'll leave you," B said.

I pushed myself up. "The Indian scared me."

"Sissy."

"Damn right," I said under my breath.

"You want to be a sissy?" B demanded. Opportunity!

"News flash, B, we're the prototypes sissies all over the world are modeled after. Look it up. I dare you."

B stopped walking and hauled his phone out. Oh, hell yeah! It took him a moment to open Wikipedia. I crossed my fingers, and watched, spellbound, while B typed 'sissy' into the search field. I nearly had a heart attack when 404

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“What?” B asked.

“This is stupid, B. We should go home. Normal people are sleeping now.” I glanced at the headlights of a passing car, blinding myself.

“Who cares what normal people are doing,” B said. “Normal is stupid.” *A fair point.*

I flailed for a stronger argument and stumbled over a crack in the sidewalk. “Okay, B. It doesn't matter whether sleeping at night is smart or stupid. What matters is that we're going to get there and no one will take your order.”

B's gaze went from the fog to his

shoes. "Heather needs me. I told her I would help if I could. Well, now I can."

"She'll be asleep," I said. Down the street a car turned a corner, headlights flashing over a man beside me. I tried to leap away, but my feet tangled around themselves, even as my brain told me it was just the wooden Indian in front of the tobacco shop. At least in the darkness no one could see me fall.

"If you can't keep up, I'll leave you," B said.

I pushed myself up. "The Indian scared me."

"Sissy."

"Darn right," I said under my breath.

"You *want* to be a sissy?" B demanded. *Opportunity!*

"News flash, B, we're the prototypes sissies all over the world are modeled

after. Look it up. I dare you.”

B stopped walking and hauled his phone out. *Oh, hell yeah!* It took him a moment to open Wikipedia. I crossed my fingers, and watched, spellbound, while B typed 'sissy' into the search field. I nearly had a heart attack when 404 flashed on the screen. B muttered and pressed the reload button, and a moment later the Sissy page opened, complete with a photo of a young man wearing thick glasses. The photo's caption read *Bjorn Halvorson*.

“I'm filing a complaint,” B said after a long moment.

“Go ahead,” I giggled. “I used your account.”

B started walking again. Every few seconds he checked his phone. Every time he did it, I giggled.

“At least you spelled my name right,”

B said.

I choked a desire to tell him a misspelling would protect his reputation.

“I think we're here,” B said.

I glanced around. We stood next to a tall wooden fence, in the shadow of a giant fir. The mailbox said Wells on the side. The house was two stories. All of the windows were dark.

“We should be sleeping,” I said.

“Sleep is for sissies,” he said out of habit.

“We're sissies, B,” I pointed out.

“You even looked it up.”

“No, we're customers.”

“Look at the place, B! It's dark.

They're sleeping. You go creeping around in their yard; you're going to get shot.” I tugged on his sleeve, and he

jerked his arm away, nearly falling.

“Nobody is going to shoot us, we're on a public street.”

“Bullets don't stop for property lines,” I said.

“You watch too much TV,” B said without the slightest hint of irony.

“Besides, I told her I would help if I could. Well, now I have money, so now I help.”

“We should have come this afternoon,” I pointed out. “Daylight would have been better.”

“I know,” he said, “but I had to run a facial recognition search to get the address.”

“You what?”

B opened the gate and went into the yard. “Don't worry about it,” he said over his shoulder, “she has to get up to

answer the door bell anyway.” I ground my teeth. B's favorite joke wasn't funny at the best of times.

“Please don't do it, B.”

He rang the door bell.

I wavered. What to do? Run away? Call 911? I should have tackled him. *Why do I always think of the right answer after it's too late?*

Frozen, I stood a few steps from the porch waiting. My heart hammered in my chest. B took one step back, folded his hands, and waited just like I'd taught him.

I counted to 30 in my head. “Let's go, B. I think they're on vacation or something.”

“I hear footsteps.”

I couldn't hear anything, so I counted again. Behind the security screen the door opened, and a woman about 35

stared at us. She seemed more annoyed than worried, but then intimidating isn't the word people use to describe us. Plus she had one hand in the pocket of her robe.

“Can I help you?” she asked, a bit louder than needed.

I willed B to be eloquent.

“Is Heather here?” he asked.

“What?!” The arm leading into the pocket tensed. I opened my mouth to say something calming, but only squeaked.

“Is Heather here?” he repeated.

I found my voice. “Come on, B, we can come back later.”

“I wouldn't,” the lady said.

“Heather stopped at my house,” B explained. The woman's eyes narrowed and he pressed on. “She said she needed my help, because everyone else was

doing a lot better than she was. We could even save a life.”

“Are you talking about the cookie drive?!” the woman demanded.

I'm not good with people, but I was sure B's explanation was making things worse.

“Yes,” said B, “the Girl Scout Cookies...”

“Do you have any idea what time it is?” she shouted.

B checked his watch. “It's 3:17.”

“What the hell is wrong with you? And how did you find our house?”

The pressure was on. B would tell her about facial recognition, and then she would shoot us. Something in my brain tripped. A little shock went from the base of my skull down to my toes, and for the first time in my life I knew what to say.

“Aspergers.”

Her eyes flicked to me, and she blinked. “What? Did you you just say what I think you said?”

B looked at me, confused. “Probably not,” I said, “you say it ASP, like the snake, then ERGERS. Not ASS BURGERS.”

“Uh huh,” she grunted, “what is that?”

“It's a form of autism. He's actually more normal than he seems.”

“Oh,” she said, voice going soft like she was talking to a baby, “and you came to buy cookies, honey. We still have quite a few. How many would you like?” She took her hand out of her robe pocket and I took my first real breath since B opened the gate.

“I don't have Aspergers,” said B.

The lady snickered, then blushed from her collar to her hair.

“You do too, B,” I said. “We’ll fight about it later. Right now you need to tell her what you want.”

B stared at his feet. I knew he wanted to argue, but he also wanted cookies. Multi-tasking was not his thing, and now he had to decide which one to do first. *Wait for it.*

“Where’s Heather?” he asked.

“I’m really sorry about this,” I said.

“She’s sleeping, honey,” said the lady, “it’s the middle of the night.”

“She said she needed my help,” B said.

“Well, she does, but it’s the *middle of the night*. You know about regular business hours, right?” she asked; her eyes locked on mine.

“I tried to tell him,” I mumbled.

“I know about business hours,” B said, “but I thought we should hurry. Heather said the contest was almost over. And besides, I'm hungry.”

“Just tell me what you want, and I'll get them,” the lady looked at me and mouthed *help me*, but all I had to offer was a helpless shrug.

“I don't want to help *you* win the contest,” B said, “I promised I would help *Heather* if I got some money. Well, Granny died and now I have some.”

The lady gasped.

B pulled a wad of bills out of his pocket. I gasped. He had a fistful of hundreds.

“How much do you think Girl Scout Cookies cost?” she asked, eyes wide.

“I don't remember,” he said. “I

brought \$10,000; is that enough?"

"It's probably too much," I said, "but I suppose that depends on how many cookies you want."

"Heather said her troop has a contest every fall, so I need enough to last all year," B said.

"We don't have that many," said the lady, "but I'll sell you our whole stock."

"No," said B, "I came to help Heather."

"You are helping Heather," she tried, "I'm her mother. I'll give her the money as soon as she wakes up."

"How do I know I can trust you?" he asked.

"I'm her *mother*..."

B crossed his arms and shook his head. "My mother left me."

Her mouth opened. Closed. Opened.

Closed again. She looked at the wad of cash.

“Can you bring him back later?” she asked me.

I glanced at B. “He's kind of persistent sometimes. He'll probably just wait on the sidewalk.”

She scrubbed her hands over her face, glanced at the gate, then at B's cash. Her sigh went on so long I wondered how much air could fit in a soccer mom.

“Wait here. I'll get her.”

We could just hear her voice down the hall. “Honey, you need to get up, you have a customer.”

It took poor Heather a few minutes to wake up enough to meet us at the front door. She was blond and skinny and missing a front tooth. B said she was beautiful, and she smiled and said,

“Thank you.”

“I want to buy all of your cookies,” he said, holding out his money.

She looked at the money in his hand.

“That's too much. I only have 91 boxes left. That's \$364 worth.”

B frowned and counted out four crisp \$100 bills. I saw the problem immediately.

“Do you have change for a hundred?” I asked.

The lady's eyes widened. “Not really,” she said, “will you take a check?”

“No checks,” B said. “People scam you with checks.”

“He'll take an EFT,” I said. “Do you have Paypal?”

“What's that?” she asked.

“Never mind.”

“How about if we just sell you \$300 worth?” she suggested.

“I want them all,” B said.

“Give them \$400,” I said, “think of it as a tip.”

“She's not a waiter,” B said.

We're never getting out of here. I wanted to choke B. Or scream. I turned in a slow circle. Sometimes motion cut the irritation.

My eyes lit on the wheelbarrow beside the porch. “We can't carry that many cookies in our arms,” I said pointing.

“Yeah,” B said, “I didn't think of that. How much do you want for your wheelbarrow?”

The lady winked at me. “\$36.”