

© 2019 Michael Sheen Cuddy

Chapter 16

What's So Damn Funny?

MUSIC: (FADE IN) BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME

NARRATOR

You're listening to The Blizzard of Osborn by Michael Sheen Cuddy.
Chapter 16: What's So Damn Funny?

MUSIC: BLIZZARD OF OSBORN THEME (FADE OUT)

Scene One: Ext., desert, day.

SOUND: Wind, hooves walking, cicadas-birds

CASSIE

Oh my God!

SLY

What is it Cassie?

CASSIE

We're in the desert! When's the last time anyone saw a tree?

ASSAM

Tree?

© 2019 Michael Sheen Cuddy

CASSIE

Yes, Queen Mavis said *Always look for the tallest tree to find your way to the Pinnacle of Aspire.*

MEMYSELFANDI

Now remember Cassie, what we're really looking for is cell towers, which are often housed within the tallest tree.

ASSAM

Now, don't you worry Cassie, there ain't many trees in the desert but there *is* plenty of cell towers.

CASSIE

Where? I don't see any.

ASSAM (chuckling)

Well you're standing right next to one.

CASSIE

This?

NARRATOR

Cassie looked up at a rusty lamp pole beside an abandoned railway track.

ASSAM

That's right. In the desert cell towers are placed in the tallest structures: lamp posts, electrical power pylons, wind turbines up on

© 2019 Michael Sheen Cuddy

the bluffs. At the mine where I used to work there was a big old radio tower. They stopped using radio a long time ago but they still kept it as a cell tower. So if it's cell towers you're looking for I can find 'em. I've been on these trails so many times I know every cell tower between here and the Great Divide.

MEMYSELFANDI

Speaking of trails, you said we'd avoid walking along the railroad tracks.

ASSAM

I said we'd stay off the main line. What we're on now is a long abandoned spur line.

MEMYSELFANDI

And how do you know those Empire Rail Service goons won't find us here?

ASSAM

Them boys is creatures of habit. For all their techno gadgetry they ain't really that smart. And they're lazy. They won't wander too far from the comfort of their air-conditioned rovers. These here spur lines are rough, overgrown with cactus and creosote. Plus they're cralwin' with snakes, scorpions, tarantulas and carnilopes.

MEMYSELFANDI

Carnilopes you say? I don't like the sound of that.

© 2019 Michael Sheen Cuddy

ASSAM

Yep, carnilopes. They're exactly what they sound like: carnivorous antelopes. They can run 80 v-squared an hour, jump 20 'd high and rip your face off before you say goodbye.

MEMYSELFANDI

And you're leading us right to them?

ASSAM

Don't worry. We got ourselves a secret weapon.

MEMYSELFANDI

What secret weapon?

NARRATOR

Assam glanced at Sly.

ASSAM

It so happens that Carnilopes are terrified of snakes. If they see a snake they won't come within leapin' distance.

MEMYSELFANDI

Well Sly, it looks like you've finally made yourself useful.

MUSIC: (Meander)

© 2019 Michael Sheen Cuddy

Scene Two: Ext., desert, day.

SOUND: Wind, Hooves walking

NARRATOR

After hours of trekking they came to a fork in the tracks. One set veered left, the other right. Both looked abandoned, both were choked with tumbleweed and sage. Assam gazed to the left, then to the right. He squinted up at the sun then glanced back in the direction from which they'd come.

ASSAM

Hmmm now, I reckon what we have here is a classic dilemma.

CASSIE

What do you mean?

ASSAM

Well, the left fork may be a little safer but it takes a lot longer. The right fork is shorter but has a few more hazards.

MEMYSELFANDI

I say we take the safe way.

ASSAM

Now I didn't say the left fork is completely safe. Since it takes longer, we risk running out of food and O. And that, my friends, will be a major problem.

© 2019 Michael Sheen Cuddy

SLY

What hazards are you talking about on the right?

ASSAM

Well, the tracks on the right go through Skirling country. Skirlings are a fierce desert tribe known to be extremely hostile.

SLY

And how much faster is the right fork?

ASSAM

Well, if we don't run into any Skirlings we should reach the Pinnacle of Aspire several days earlier. However, if we do run into Skirlings, I hate to even think of what they might do to us.

SLY

Well what are the chances of running into Skirlings?

ASSAM

Well, the odds may be in our favor. There's a rumor that neighboring war lords have attacked Skirlings with poison gas. Some say the Skirlings have been totally wiped out. But if they ain't, then we got us a problem.

NARRATOR

In the end, they decided to vote. They chose the slower—and they hoped—safer way.

© 2019 Michael Sheen Cuddy

MUSIC: (Meander)

Scene Three: Ext., desert, day.

SOUND: Wind, hooves walking, crows

NARRATOR

They'd been following the left fork of the abandoned rail track for a long time before Assam stopped and nodded at a rusty hulk silhouetted against the horizon.

ASSAM

See that gantry over yonder? I worked there for over nine years!

CASSIE

How did you end up in the railway barn where we met you?

ASSAM

Well, I used to haul the slag wagons from the pits to the surface. But when vulonium, the new energy source replaced lignite, they retired me to the freight yard barns.

CASSIE

Oh, that's sad.

ASSAM

Yeah well, it could'a been worse. I overheard 'em say they was gonna

© 2019 Michael Sheen Cuddy

send me to the renderin' plant down in Oweet'ktah Falls. Butcher, gut, skin and boil me. Render me down to glue and hair. But then Reza stepped up, said he was a big horse lover, volunteered to adopt me, convinced everyone I should be their mascot.

MEMYSELFANDI

Hmmm, did you say *horse* lover?

ASSAM

When Reza brought me to the freight yard some of them lunkheads called me *Donkey Dick* but that made Reza furious! He ordered everyone to address me as 'Assam.' He said the name is Nurolian or somethin', it means Spirit of the Tempest Cloud. I have to credit Reza, he saved my life. Still, that freight barn was no place for a thoroughbred Andalusian stallion.

SLY

Dude, I hate to break it to you—

CASSIE

Sly, let Assam finish his story!

ASSAM

I always dreamed of leaving that rail barn. A thoroughbred Andalusian stallion should be servicin' lovely mares on a stud farm, not cooped up in a dingy railroad roundhouse, breathing fumes 24/7, feet aching from standing on cold hard concrete, subjected to the depredations of

© 2019 Michael Sheen Cuddy

lunkheads.

MEMYSELFANDI

Depredations you say?

ASSAM

Whenever Reza went away them lunkheads teased me. They threw things at me, pulled on my ears. One time they tied a bucket o' sand to my tail and laughed like a bunch o' hyenas.

SLY

Why didn't you just leave if you were so miserable there?

ASSAM

Well, to tell you the truth, I was afraid to risk it all on my own. See, I prefer workin' with a team, like when I was at the mine. I got to work alongside donkeys, mules, pack horses, even a couple of Clydesdales. 'Course I was the only thoroughbred Andalusian stallion.

SLY

(sniggering)

MEMYSELFANDI

(throat-clearing)

CASSIE

You must miss your friends.

© 2019 Michael Sheen Cuddy

ASSAM

I do. But after a while, I just assumed this is how it was meant to be.

MEMYSELFANDI

So, a fatalist then, are we?

SLY

An ass is more like it!

CASSIE

Sly—don't you know it's rude to interrupt?

ASSAM

The old mine is abandoned now. All my pals either died or moved on. I heard rumors that some went to work for the Emperor in his palace. That's why I wanted to come along when you said you was goin' to see the Emperor. I assume there's always a place for a thoroughbred Andalusian stallion in every Emperor's stables, don't y'all agree?

SLY

Look dude, I'm sorry but if you're a thoroughbred Andalusian stallion, I'm a fire-breathing dragon!

ASSAM

I beg your pardon!

© 2019 Michael Sheen Cuddy

SLY

Yeah you can beg all you want but that ain't gonna change what I see when I look at you: a jackass, plain and simple.

ASSAM

Insulted by a lowly snake? Why I oughta—

SLY

Look pal, why don't you get off your high horse and take a good look at yourself? You ain't no horse! You might wish you're an Andalusian stallion but wishin' don't make it so. You're a donkey. Or a mule, whatever. An ass. A common beast of burden.

NARRATOR

Assam turned his back side to the snake, lifted his tail and dropped a turd that would have fallen right on Sly's head had he not been so quick to turn away.

SOUND: flatulence

SLY

Oh, that's rude! (hissing)

ASSAM

Well what do you expect after insultin' me?

SLY

I wasn't insulting you! Ain't nothing wrong with being an ass. The

© 2019 Michael Sheen Cuddy

donkey is a noble creature. He may not get the respect of an Andalusian stallion but from time immemorial he was beloved by many a prospector, pioneer, bushwhacker and explorer. In cultures all around the Empire the donkey's been the backbone on all the greatest journeys: Bannobahl crossing the Kawkus—

MEMYSELFANDI

Excuse me but, those were elephants.

SLY

Yeah, elephants got the best press. They looked magnificent decked out in their orange silks, flashing their emerald-studded halters, trumpeting snow geysers out of their mighty trunks! But donkeys were the real workhorses, they did all the heavy lifting, plodded along steadfast, never whined about the food the way the sherpas did.

ASSAM

For a lowly reptile your effrontery is doubly insultin'. You ain't just rude: once you get talking, no one else can squeeze a word in!

SLY

Well you keep puttin on airs like you're some kind of royalty. All I'm sayin' is take a good look at yourself and then just accept it, ain't nothin' wrong with bein' a donkey.

ASSAM

And I'm just saying that my pedigree papers—issued at birth by no

© 2019 Michael Sheen Cuddy

less an authority than The Master Genome Database in Lac du Sel—attest that my forebears hailed from a long line of thoroughbred Andalusian horses! And correct me if I'm wrong but I assume you ain't no authority on equestrian breedin.'

SLY

Hey, like I said, you can assume whatever you want, but that don't change the fact that you're just a common ass.

CASSIE

Sly! Just because you have opinions doesn't mean everyone wants to hear them all the time.

SLY

Oh come on, Cassie! This ass is delusional! He needs to be set straight on who and what he really is.

CASSIE

Do you know who you really are?

SLY

Absolutely. I am motion primeval. I slither forth, belly to the Earth, tapped into the vital heartbeat of the Gaian essence. I am the first and the last baby, the alpha and the omega. I gave birth to you feckless hominids and hung back to watch you hang yourselves. I will be here long after you're gone and I will remain strong among the weak and foolish.

© 2019 Michael Sheen Cuddy

NARRATOR

Cassie went from looking very angry to shaking her head to glancing at Assam, Jet and Memyselfandi. Then she started laughing.

SOUND: laughter

NARRATOR (cont.)

Assam grinned, his big square teeth protruding, Memyselfandi laughed so hard he held his belly and shook like a big egg bouncing in a pot of boiling water.

SOUND: more laughter

NARRATOR (cont.)

Even Jet looked like she was grinning from ear to ear.

SOUND: group laughter

SLY

What? What's so damn funny?

SOUND: flatulence, laughter

CASSIE, ASSAM, MEMYSELFANDI

(laughter spreading, growing)

MUSIC: (Furthermore, Blizzard Theme (FADE IN / OUT))

© 2019 Michael Sheen Cuddy

NARRATOR

Next: They knew the path they chose could be risky, but they never dreamed it would turn out the way it did!

[end Chapter 16]