

Things That Are Sticky

Beneath gold-framed glass, I saw it. There's a large carrot, the tip running off the bottom edge of the picture. A chubby farmer holds the giant vegetable in place, grinning from ear to ear. Made me laugh.

There I was, sitting in front of this great big black desk, looking from diploma to award all lined up nice across the wall. The carpet was clean, the room had no smell. Papers were stacked real neat on top of the desk. Everything serious, because this guy at the other side of the desk is important and authority. Order incarnate. Real big guy with real big power. Holding the world on his shoulders kind of power, stare chaos in the face and don't blink kind of power, don't break the dress code and forget to wear your tie to school or he'll own your ass 'til summer kind of power. And he was still proud of his amazing idiot farmer days with experimental growth and shit.

So yeah, I laughed. Right in the middle of eternity, of his eternal speech. You almost could have called it a giggle, only it wasn't girly. I'm too insanely masculine for that. You can't blame me for laughing, but this guy, this stiff, this damned redneck-turned-High and Mighty Hero, he didn't like it too much.

"Young man," he says, flashing a rabbit-toothed grin my way, "I'm about this far from kicking you straight out of sch--"

"I'm not even a student."

He blinks. Bastard gives me this look he must've used a lot when he was a farmer. Farmers are always stupid, except when they aren't farmers anymore. So he gives me the look, and I laugh again. Yeah, I repeat my masculine giggle.

More of a cackle, maybe.

"Why would..."

I cut in again. Just like me, to interrupt. I don't think he would've finished anyway. "I heard they were cutting up frogs today," I said. "I thought it would be interesting. And it was, too. All the blood... All the squirming little froggies. There were so many students, teacher must not've seen me come in."

The frogs really were interesting for awhile. But it turned out the science teacher was also a football coach, and just as much of a stiff as this guy Mr. Power with the carrot picture. Neither had much of a sense of humor.

I stood up. What's he gonna do to stop me? Make me take a "time out"? Force me to wear the fucking dunce cap? Call my mommy on the telephone? Hell no. I'm untouchable. Even if I'm not, what could this guy do without a name?

School's always been trouble. Use it if you need it, avoid it if you can. You make one mistake and they'll punish you over and over again. You make two, they'll keep at it all year. You make three, even if you're not out, you're out. They'll never give you a straight look and be sincere. They'll smile, maybe, and give a real cheerful "Hullo!" when they pass you in the halls, but they'll be watching. You come in late, they're there. You forget your homework, there're there. You try anything that looks like it might be mischief, there they are. You take a piss and guess who's watching.

It's not worth it, if you can avoid it. You gotta get out early, but not too early. You gotta get out maybe your last year of middle school or first year of high school. Soon as you're strong enough to make your own way. And if you can't just leave, make it so they don't want you. But once you *do* get out, don't ever look back and, sure as hell, don't you dare even *try* visiting the damned thing.

It ain't worth it. I thought it might be.

It's not that bad, being alone on your own. It's better than being "a part of something". You see a preacher over here taking advantage of little choir boys, a cop over there with a stick stuck so far up his ass he walks funny, and a family-oriented disciplinarian prick over here thinks he's saving you from getting taken to prison by the funny-walk cop by recommending you to the molester preacher. They're all rotten nutty.

Not that community's the kind of thing you ever escape, really. I mean, I'm out on the edge but am I really gone? Hell no. The wall's too thick for me to break through. I can crack it, though, and if you're up against the wall... At least you're not in the middle anymore. Try to get out. Try and fail. You won't be like *them*, and that's enough.

That was my mistake. I came back in to play a little game. I was gonna stand out, but I was gonna stand out among them. It doesn't work that way. They're like the borg. You touch `em, you'll be assimilated. Or just broken. So I got in and suddenly I'm getting out. Real fucking fast.

They'll chase me. Hell yeah, they'll chase me when they find out who I am. But I'm gone, out, upupup and away. Livin' easy again. It'll be cool. Everything'll be cool.

So I catch a ride and I'm on my way to the state border. They probably wouldn't chase me that far, but why take chances? I'm a ghost to them and I'll still be a ghost tomorrow.

This guy picks me up... Real great guy. He won't put anything on except his Dixie Chicks tape. Over and over again. And again. I had about enough of those bitches after the first fucking song. But that's ok. The guy's giving me a free ride, right? Screw the music.

The little car smells fantastic inside. The fat man at the wheel thinks deodorant's a sin. Just like showering. And the skinny man in back smells about as good as his friend.

Brothers, maybe? Probably just close friends. But the way they talk to each other... Seems like more than friendship glues those two together. Not love, exactly, but close. Just as deep, maybe.

Fat man'll say something like, "I hear Florida's real nice this time of year." Skinny Man'll come back with a simple "Yeah," and then they'll both start laughing. Meanwhile, I'm wondering what the hell they're talking about and trying to drown out the music at the same time.

Sure. I know we're *going* to Florida. Of course we're going to Florida. It's the closest and it's just what I asked for and that's where we're headed. Why's that funny?

That kind of thing's second nature to those two. They'll say stuff like that all the bloody time, except when Fat Man's singing along with his favorite band. Sometimes Skinny Man'll be the chorus. Ugh... I swear, soon as the car stops, I'm not *gonna* stop stomping on that fucking tape.

We still had a little ways to go, so I decided on a real short nap. Sounds like fun, right? Trying to sleep to them groovin' Dixie Chicks turned up as far as they'll go. Yeah, should be easy. But what's that kind of moist, sticky stuff I get on my fingers? I think... I think it's blood!

No, not blood. Couldn't be. It feels warm and gooey, and... sticky. I pull up my hand to see what I'll see. It's green. Definitely not some bloody mess. But what? These guys eat a lot of gummy bears or something?

I keep probing with my hand like an idiot and, sure enough, there's gooey crap everywhere. Look down to see a dried, rubbery form of the stuff lining the seatbelt buckle. Look up, there's even a little bit on the window! How the hell do you drop a piece of candy *up* there?

Not my problem. Sure as fuck not my bloody problem. These Dixie Hicks might be messy, stupid, and incoherent, but it's not my job to baby-sit retards. Fucking idiots'll get me over the state, then I'm gone.

Only, things don't quite turn out that way. In fact, it turns out the Dixie Hicks aren't stupid at all, so the nickname doesn't fit. It doesn't fit because hicks are always stupid. That's why they're hicks.

These people, they're real smart. A little incoherent maybe, and as crazy as crazies come. But smart.

Smarter than me, anyway. Pricks got me locked up in the back of their fucking cabin, right, so naturally I try to escape. But before I even make plans of getting away, they're there to stop me. They're getting real psychological about it, too. Luckily, so far, that head stuff's just giving me a headache.

I don't like the way the bastards look at me. Not healthy, I tell you. It's like I'm their newest toy or something, and they're just waiting for me to break so they can rush out to get a new one. It's a look that's maybe a little worse than the one I used to get from Mr. Power every day. Maybe.

They haven't hurt me a whole bunch yet. Made me drink poison, get real sick, but it wasn't lethal. Scared me more than anything. Probably the point. Of all of it.

I'm escaping real soon. Know it, I can feel it, it's my only shot. Stay in here too much longer, these guys're bored watching me. So they're trying to scare me. What happens when I'm not afraid anymore? What they got planned for the final scene?

There'll be a party. Fatso'll pull out the stereo, crank up the volume real loud. Skinny'll pull out the Dixie Chicks' Greatest Hits. Everybody's dancing like mad. They'll probably even break out the damned wineglasses. Maybe I'll be the damned cake.

But that's not gonna happen, since I'm out tonight. Tonight, when the fat man comes in to pick up my tray, I'll be standing there ready to hand it to him. He wants it, whambambam, he can have it. And screw their guns. Skinny gets in my way, he gets the same.

I'm pretty crazed, I guess. Letting it all get to me. Just like they want. But fuck it, that doesn't matter. I'll get out tonight. I can feel it.

So the skinny guy comes prancing down the hall to open the door, prancing like a damned fairy. He's dancin' and singin' and he knows all the words to *Wide Open Spaces*. He's cocky, too, because it's been days since I've tried to run, so he figures I'm about broken. And anyway, surely I wouldn't try the ol' hiding behind the door trick. Again.

So he walks and sings and dances and I'm waiting where I'm supposed to be, and I hear fatty prancing up behind him. Skinny Man opens door, Skinny Man looks around all cautious like. Skinny knows something's wrong. So he's about to pull his gun and charge into the room too fast for me to attack when chubby Dixie fairy man dances right into him, and they both come tumbling down.

Whamwhamwham, bambambam. I beat the shit out of them with the tray, I pinch the guns, and I'm out. As I pass through the kitchen, I see bags of half-eaten gummy candies all over the place.

Damn them for not sharing.

So now I'm driving off in their car. I'd like to call what I'm doing driving. But hey, it's my first try, and I swear those mailboxes were looking at me cockeyed. So screw `em all.

The tape! That stupid, stupid tape. They left it in the car. How the hell do they know I'm gonna get away, so why not? And sure as shit, that tape's in a million pieces now.

I gotta get me some gummies. That's what life's about. Not gummies in the specific, you understand, but small pleasures. Like chewy, oh so gooey candies. Yummy yummy gummies.

So here I am, executing a *perfect* turn into the parking lot, when one of those crazy old ladies you're always bitching about flips me the bird. I just smile, flip it right back at her, and drive on up to the grocery store.

It's been ten years, so now I'm fat as hell. And that's how I got addicted to candy.