

# Can't Sleep

December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1978.

Ten birthday candles burned low on a homemade almond-chocolate cake. Ten children gathered around it waiting for Mikey Gale to blow the candles out. He was waiting stern faced and staring for his “surprise.” His mother, Lesley, who had promised the “surprise” only after the cake, waited behind the other children's parents. Lesley pulled back a curtain and bounced.

“Hurry up, Mikey,” she said. “Hurry up. It's almost time.”

“Okay, momma.” Mikey rolled his eyes and blew nine candles out. The gathered kids cheered, and the parents sang as Mikey blew the tenth out.

“Okay. Okay,” Lesley yelled and opened the door. “He's here.”

A clown with a heavy grin and lofty balloons stepped through, tracking snow inside. He had a round face painted white with blue triangles around his eyes, just a white nose, and a wedgy red mouth. It was like a five year old had gotten a hold of mommy's makeup and went to town on a pumpkin.

“It's Pogo the Clown,” Lesley announced.

“Hey kids!” Pogo yelled and bounced.

There were games, confetti, horns, squawkers, squeakers, poppers, balloons in the

## FROM A HOLE IN THE SKY

shapes of snakes, spiders, and scorpions. A good time was had by all.

When it came time to open presents, Pogo the Clown insisted that Mikey sit in his lap, which Mikey did gleefully.

As Mikey opened model airplane kits and Star Wars action figures, Pogo the Clown rocked him back and forth in his lap, patting his leg with his thinly gloved hand, patting Mikey's inner thigh, leaning in and smelling the boy's hair, breathing hard on his neck.

\* \* \*

May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1994.

“Do you know who that fucking... clown was?” Mike Gale asked. He stood in the alley off of Blake Avenue. He had had an awful morning at Gallant Medical Supplies, got into another argument with his boss, Brycen Mullers.

Mike had gone to lunch and didn't plan on going back to work until the next morning when if they wanted to fire him they could. He'd find another job just like he always had.

Mike was walking down Blake Avenue, enjoying his sixth cigarette of the day, and headed to the Hell's Up Bar when he saw a clown waiting just inside the ally. The clown stood tall, wore a fuzzy orange hat, and had his face painted white with red circles for eyes, and a blue square for a mouth. His nose was painted white, small, and slightly upturned looking like he almost didn't have nose, just two, deep holes in his skull. His suit was orange and red with many puffy balls of yarn. He had on curved, oversize shoes that were a dainty blue. Around his waist hung a colorful belt and from it dangled a plastic hammer, mallet, screwdriver,

## CAN'T SLEEP

crowbar, drill, and dozens of lumpy balloons.

Mike had spotted the clown and confronted him. He told him all about his tenth birthday party, about being felt up by that clown, about that clown being arrested ten days later.

“Well?” Mike continued. “Do you know who that clown was?”

“Look buddy. I don't care.” The clown lit up his own cigarette and looked down the street.

“John Wayne Gacy. That's fucking who. He fucking killed thirty three.” Mike huffed around. “That fucker fried last night. They fried his sick ass.”

The clown turned back to Mike and half smiled.

“Don't you do that.” Mike pointed with a shaky finger. “Don't you fucking smile.”

“Why? You scared?”

“I was traumatized by that fucking clown killer. It wasn't fair.”

“He didn't kill clowns.”

“What?”

“You said clown killer.” The clown leaned against the wall. “He was a killer clown. Not a clown killer.”

“Fuck you.” Mike rubbed at his messy hair, stomped out his cigarette, and then lit up another one. “It ain't funny.”

“Dude, so what if Pogo the Clown was your birthday party clown? So what if you sat

## FROM A HOLE IN THE SKY

in his lap? So what if he copped a little feel? He didn't fuck you. He didn't kill you. Think of it like almost getting hit by a van while out walking. You didn't get hit.”

“But wouldn't you hate vans then? People would understand that, maybe take care of the vans.”

“No. It would be the *drivers* of the vans that I'd be bothered by. I'd be careful of *them*, not the vans. And it's not like there are vans plowing off the road every five minutes killing little boys. Leave the vans alone.” The clown looked back down the street.

Mike took a long drag from his cigarette and coughed a bit.

“It ain't that simple,” he said. “What's your name anyway?”

“Devon Cronom.”

“No. Your clown name. Gacy's was Pogo the Clown. Even you knew that. So, what's yours?”

“Would you believe Pogo the Clown?” The clown giggled and chuckled in clicks like a clock tocked away in his throat. “No? Well, it's Yago.”

“Yago?”

“Yep. Yago the Yugoful.” Yago bowed. “At your service, funeral or memorial?”

“You think you're funny?”

“Yep, I do. I yucking do.”

“I hope you have a kid one day who goes through the hell I went through, still going through. I am in a world of shit thanks to Pogo the Fucking Clown. You guys think you're

## CAN'T SLEEP

being funny, charming, cute. You guys are pathetic. Get a real job instead of wearing a bunch of makeup and playing with balloons. That's what you are, a bunch of faggots playing with mommy's makeup and daddy's rubbers.”

“Does that make you feel better?”

“I ought to kick your ass. Yago the Faggot Clown.”

Yago dropped his cigarette and rubbed it out with his clown shoe.

“Kids made fun of me everyday because of that shit, because of the likes of you.”

Mike stomped on the ground. “They used to pass me notes in class that read 'Gacy Loves His Boys' and 'Don't Sleep Because Clowns Will Eat You.' Darlene Bracket even passed me a note like that.” Mike stomped his feet again.

Yago, with a grin, nodded at Mike.

“You know what I'm going to do?” Mike asked.

“What? Throw another birthday party, invite nothing but clowns, but don't give them any cake?”

“I'm going to call the police and say you molested my son. I can get him to say that. That way the police can come hassle you, maybe rough you up a bit. That'd be a small, tiny payback.” Mike pinched his fingers together at Yago. “And I'm going to do it to every clown I see, Devon Cronom. Yago the Fucking Yucko.”

Yago's face shifted, turned sour. He stepped up to Mike, and Mike moved back.

“That's not a good idea,” Yago said. “Not a very good one at all. You'd better just

## FROM A HOLE IN THE SKY

drop it and go on with your little life.”

“Fuck it.” Mike raised his jittering finger. “Somebody's gotta pay for all that shit.”

After a moment of staring, Yago shook his head.

A windowless, white van rushed up to the alley and the side door opened. Inside were more clowns, closely packed and of all colors and shapes all jostling together.

Mike gawked at them, even pointed his finger at them for a moment before cursing them.

“Fucking clowns. Fuck all of you. I'm going to fuck all of you up, fuck all of your worlds up. You hear me? Fuck'em up.”

Mike never saw Yago pull a plastic mallet from his belt, shake it three times above his head, and then bash Mike's head with it. Mike went down spinning.

\* \* \*

“Mikey? Wakey,” Yago whispered in Mike's ear and then screamed, “Wake up!”

Mike Gale was tied with wires and balloons to a tilted table. He was naked and bleeding where the wires cut deep. He was in a dark room with dripping and clanking sounds seeping from the corners, many ticks and dings, splashes and slaps.

“What?” Mike asked, barely able to get his eyes open.

“Oh. You should know what,” Yago said, patting Mike on his brow. “I suggest you get your little mind all clear so you can focus.”

“You hit me?”

## CAN'T SLEEP

“Yep.”

“You knocked me out.”

“Yep. Yuck, yuck yep.” Yago stared down at Mike. “Nothing but bad things from here on out. You know that, right? I guess you've always known that.”

“Fuck you.”

“Yep. Yuck me. Yuck you, too. Oh boy, oh boy are you yucked.”

Yago grew many tiny teeth in many rows. His face grew thin, and his eyes dripped blood. His fingers became curved into claws. His breathing became long and, and he cast a shadow over everything.

Mike pissed himself, actually looked down and watched himself go all over his legs and the table.

“Hold still for a second.” Yago carved something, using his new claw-fingers, on Mike's chest. Mike, of course, screamed until he felt light headed.

The clowns from the van gathered around Mike. They all had different shaped heads, some long, some stubby, some curving, and all wore different colored suits, hats, gloves, and shoes. But they all had those teeth that looked twisted needles.

“Here, read this,” Yago said as he moved a mirror attached to a draping wires over Mike. Mike began to scream again.

Mike's chest, with words carved backwards, read in the mirror, CAN'T SLEEP OR CLOWNS WILL EAT ME.

## FROM A HOLE IN THE SKY

“Yuck, yuck,” Yago said and then kissed Mike on the cheek. “It's simple. We're going to wait for you to fall asleep and then eat you.”

“Let me out of here,” Mike struggled. “Let me out. I'm sorry. I won't tell anybody. I won't go to the police. I won't tell mommy.” Mike cried, sobbing hard. He mumbled promises over and over to never say a bad word about clowns ever again.

“Here's a bit more just for fun.” Yago produced two photos from Mike's wallet. One was of his son Dennis and the other was of his wife, Diane. They had Dennis out of wedlock five years ago, but had been married for three rough, but good years.

“Please,” Mike begged. “Please don't...”

“No. Yuck, no.” Yago held his hand over Mike's mouth. “Don't bother. I'll personally take care of them.” Yago leaned back and sniffed the air. “I know. I'll visit them next week, Thursday, about 3 a. m. I'll just knock on their door, and I bet they'll let me in. They'll probably be worried to death about you by then, Mikey. Yuck. Yuck.”

The clowns laughed and danced around. Yago let go of Mike's mouth, and Mike screamed, screamed for help, screamed curses, screamed for mercy, screamed for Jesus, God, and even the Devil. And then his voice gave.

“Sleepy?” Yago asked.

Mike tried to say “fuck you” but it came out cracked and hollow.

“Did you know that if you bleed too much, you'll go to sleep and die?”

The clowns stopped dancing, and a clown with blue yarn hair at Mike's feet bent down

## CAN'T SLEEP

and bit off three toes and most of his left foot in one hack-rattlin'-chomp.

Mike tried to struggle, but he was exhausted, his tank running low on fumes.

With his claw fingers, Yago cut at Mike's arms and legs. Mike's blood dripped from the table to the floor, which was grated, and then dripped further down to running water.

"Just close your eyes, Mikey," Yago said. "We'll take care of the rest." He then made chomping sounds with his mouth. "Yuck. Yuck."

As blood trickled and spurted from Mike's body, he grew sleepy, eyes heavy and sluggish. He stared at the mirror, at what was carved in his chest, stared at their faces. Clown faces had kept him awake as a child when he closed his eyes. Staring right at them, bloody eyed and many teethed, should have kept him awake forever.

Mike Gale grew cold and shivered, and then he numbed. He cried for a while, even tried to scream again, but his voice was gone for good. Eventually, and who knows how long it took, he calmed down. The clowns had stopped moving and just watched him with never-blinking eyes. Mike even thought of them as frozen, motionless mechanicals whose batteries had run out.

Then it happened. His eyes closed for a second too long, and he dropped off, slipped under, gave in to the exhaustion and blood loss. Mikey Gale went to sleep. That's when the clowns began to eat him. He woke right up for that. They ate him right up. They sure did.

## FROM A HOLE IN THE SKY

Copyright © 2005 Jason Hodges. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher or author.