

Unhinged: Tales of Madness and Horror

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Rigby's Law

Rigby had been plotting the kidnaping for weeks.

The waiting was driving him up the wall. At last it was time. D-Day was here. The moment of truth.

A disaster.

Things had gone sideways from the get-go. It wasn't bad enough that his kidnaping attempt had been foiled by the victim, a nine-year-old kid who had produced a gun out of nowhere and almost killed him. What followed was worse.

Where had the kid laid his hands on a gun? wondered Rigby. The kid was the son of a Silicon Valley tech billionaire who had been visiting LA with his Chinese chauffeur who was doing his best to look like Odd Job out of *Goldfinger*. Rigby had subdued the black-suited black-capped chauffeur with ease by coldcocking the guy with a sucker punch from a right hook while Odd Job was standing holding the door of his stretch limo open for the kid at the pink palace, aka the Beverly Hills Hotel, and nobody was looking.

Rigby was a big guy at over six one and knew how to throw a punch. It therefore came as no surprise to him that after the chauffeur hit the sidewalk he didn't get up. Coldcocking the chauffeur was about the only thing that went right that day.

From then on, everything went haywire.

The frigging kid, rail thin and dressed in a T, jeans, and white Adidas track shoes, whipped a .25-caliber automatic out of his jacket pocket and trained it on Rigby, who couldn't believe a nine year old would be packing heat. Caught off guard, Rigby froze, staring down the business end of a gun barrel. Breaking into a sweat he didn't know if the kid had the stones to pull the trigger, and he didn't want to find out the hard way.

Rigby turned tail, dreading the moment when he would hear gunfire behind him as he fled. He hoped the kid was just as scared of him as he was of the pistol-packing spoiled brat and that the gun-brandishing scion of a billionaire didn't know shit from Shinola when it came to firing a piece.

Rigby pelted across the parking lot to his car and noticed with deepening dread that his car was blocked in its space by some idiot that had parked illegally behind him because he couldn't find an empty parking space.

Murphy's Law strikes again, he thought with fear and a sense of helplessness. For that matter, his whole life was Murphy's Law. It wasn't confined to just one day.

Raised in a broken home, his father an alcoholic deadbeat dad that split when Rigby was nine years old, hooked on booze and smack when he was ten, busted for possession when he was fifteen, busted for B&E a year later after he got probation, an ex-con with a rap sheet, Rigby knew all about Murphy's Law. Maybe he should just change his name to Murphy, he decided acidly.

Rigby scanned the area for any sign of the driver. He gave up when he realized he had no idea what the driver looked like. All Rigby could do was stand next to the

guy's car and hope the guy would notice him—if the driver was anywhere near. But Rigby didn't have time to do that. The kid might have notified the cops of the kidnap attempt by now, and they could show up any second. Rigby had no time to lose. He had to beat it.

He could have given a couple blasts on his car's horn to summon the guy, but he didn't want to draw attention. After all, he had just tried to kidnap a rich kid. Why call attention to himself?

Which was how he ended up stealing a car in the parking lot. And that turned out to be the biggest mistake he had made so far on a day full of boners.

Clambering into the first car he could find that wasn't locked, which happened to be a silver Acura, he realized with a turn that somebody was sitting in the passenger seat. At first blush he thought it was a twentyish guy dressed in a suit.

"Excuse me," said Rigby, sweating with fear, on the verge of backing out of the driver's seat. "I thought this was my car."

He was terrified the guy would start hollering for help.

Doing a double take, Rigby noticed that the guy didn't answer. Not only that, he didn't react either. There was no expression on the motionless face, which stared through the windshield, unblinking. The guy didn't even bother to turn and look at him.

Wasn't the guy even a little bit scared? wondered Rigby with surprise. The guy was about to be carjacked for Christ's sake.

Calming his nerves, on closer inspection, Rigby came to the realization that the guy sitting next to him wasn't a guy at all. It was a ventriloquist's dummy.

Rigby sighed with relief and laughed at himself. He had been scared of a stupid dummy. Then he got angry at the dummy. The thing had all but given him a heart attack, decided Rigby. Snarling, he wanted to rear back and give it a good lick in its ugly kisser.

It wasn't surprising when Rigby thought about it. A dummy sitting in a car seat. Why not? he decided. This was Beverly Hills, and the Beverly Hills Hotel catered to celebrities. Probably some celeb ventriloquist had parked here and forgot to lock his car, decided Rigby.

He had no time to think about it. He had to split.

He reached to turn the key in the ignition.

Except there wasn't any key.

Cursing, Rigby flung his hand upward like he was putting a shot and slammed the headliner with his open palm.

He pulled himself together, realizing he didn't have time to throw a tantrum. Taking long breaths he collected himself. Some owners, he knew, kept spare keys in their cars. He hoped this celeb ventriloquist was one of those owners.

Rigby knew he had to work fast. He flipped open the glove compartment, which smelled musty, and flicked his fingers through the sundry papers, maps, and manuals stuffed inside it. No sign of a key. He reached above him and pulled down the two visors, inspecting their backs one after the other. Still no key.

At wits' end, he tried to think where else an owner would stash a key.

Leaning over he picked up the edge of the vinyl floor mat, slid his fingers under the mat, and felt for the key. He started. He felt something stashed there. He plucked it out and inspected it.

He smiled in triumph. It was the key.

He jabbed it into the ignition and twisted it, firing the engine.

Checking to see if there were any cops around and satisfied there weren't, he backed out of his space and pulled casually out of the lot so as not to draw attention, hoping the rich brat hadn't spotted him and wouldn't be able to rat out Rigby's method of escape to the cops when they arrived. Since nothing else had gone right this day, Rigby figured the kid *had* spotted his stealing the car.

Rigby drove off with the dummy seated beside him. The dummy continued staring blankly through the windshield.

It wasn't long before Rigby felt like a fool with this dummy sitting next to him. He dreaded that other drivers would start rubbernecking at the idiot driver with the dummy sitting beside him. He hoped they would think he was using the dummy to hoodwink the traffic cops into thinking he had a legitimate passenger to avoid a ticket while he drove in the carpool lane. Except he wasn't on the freeway yet, and there was no carpool lane.

Rigby didn't like the dummy's face. He never liked dummy's faces. They always looked like caricatures. They didn't look human to him. The dummy looked like it had stepped out of a cartoon with its apple red, round cheeks and pug nose. And of course those big bulging eyes that all dummies seemed to have, the glass eyes that stared straight ahead . . . or were they staring straight ahead? Even though they were looking straight ahead, they seemed to be looking at him at the same time like one of those portraits where the subject's eyes seemed to follow you around the room wherever you went even though you knew it was impossible, decided Rigby. Like the dummy was watching him out of the corner of its eye without actually moving its eye.

The thing was making his skin crawl.

Rigby tore his gaze away from the dummy's face and focused on the traffic through the windshield.

Look where you're going, numskull.

Now he could hear himself thinking out loud. He could literally hear his voice. His nerves must be getting to him. Normally, he couldn't hear his voice when he was thinking. Strange . . .

He slammed on the brakes so he didn't rear-end the old lady in front of him who was driving ten miles slower than the posted speed limit.

As the Acura braked, the dummy sitting beside Rigby went flying off the front seat, smashed its face against the dashboard, and sprawled on the mat in the foot well.

Cursing under his breath, Rigby switched lanes so he wouldn't continue driving behind the little old lady from Pasadena with her frosted blue hair, a menace to society who was just asking to be creamed in an accident driving like that.

At the next light, Rigby stopped, leaned down, hefted the dummy up from the mat by the scruff of the neck, and sat him back on the passenger seat. Rigby didn't know why he felt compelled to put the dummy back on the seat. He would have felt more comfortable with the dummy down in the foot well and out of sight of passing drivers.

Then why did he put the stupid thing back on the seat, as if he felt the dummy was uncomfortable sprawled on its face in the foot well? Dummies didn't have feelings, he reminded himself. He should have just left the thing where it was, out of sight and out of mind.

The driver behind him leaned on his horn.

Rigby swung his gaze ahead and realized the light had turned green. He lifted his foot off the brake and accelerated.

You're gonna get us killed, idiot.

There he was talking to himself again, decided Rigby. He could hear his thoughts in his ears. This miserable day was getting to him. He wished it was over and none of it had ever happened. But wishes never came true, he had learned from the hardest taskmaster of them all, experience.

And thanks for slamming my head against the dashboard.

The voice wasn't his, realized Rigby. They weren't his thoughts he was hearing. He didn't talk like a cartoon character. The voice sounded sort of like Bugs Bunny with his wise-ass New York accent.