

PRIZED GARDEN OF BEAVERTON PROPER
BY KRISTOFER JAMES

AUNT BLANCHE: Lighten the mood? Hubert, you've got the social tact of a drunk armadillo. (BEAT) Some people don't have the sense God gave a cucumber.

I know what you meant. You meant to brush her off. But she's more than somebody's WIFE with a flower garden. She's a whole person.

I'm from a different time. But, you reduced her to nothin' but a hormonal creature because you made a joke and blamed a natural bodily function.

Hubert, maybe it's just that some of us have learned to take little jabs here and there, quietly choosin' our battles, because it gets exhausting engaging with idiots. And if you find this ain't a problem for you, maybe you need to double check the request submitted to God by your momma and daddy when they prayed for your delivery into this world, and make sure "idiot" wasn't checked on the damn form.

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AUNT BLANCHE: Oh for heaven's sake—just stop with the apologies! I've been around long enough to see a few storms, and honey, this world right now feels like a tornado spun outta crazy. I don't even turn on the news anymore--too much yelling, not enough understandin.' Everybody's mad at everybody. Folks are fightin' with their neighbors, their cousins, their Facebook friends--over the dumbest things!

And don't even get me started on the politicians. All of 'em! They stir the pot when they know better, and we're the ones cleanin' up the mess!

You know what I think? I think we've all forgot what team we're on. Families fallin' out, and meanwhile, the rest of us--down here on the front lines, the ones payin' bills and raisin' kids--well, we're just tryin' to make it through the week with our sanity in tack, and enough money to put food on the table. Maybe it's time we quit lookin' across at each other tryin' to find someone to blame--and start lookin' up, before we forget what hope even looks like. Beulah, I am sorry someone destroyed your garden, I truly am, but y'all, this has got to stop.

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BEULAH: Momma caught on quick. I tried to hide it, but she was always in my business. She knew everything. That's why I tried so hard not to meddle in Tommy's life like she did with mine. Maybe I made a mistake, but I didn't want to be her. She made me go to the doctor, and when the results came back, Mama and Daddy just started planning my life like I wasn't even there. That's when I knew, I wasn't lettin' them take control.

And then Buford came over. It turned into this huge fight, but he was already in his tuxedo. I thought it'd be better to be alone, to just try and figure things out. So, I told Buford to go on without me, to call you. I thought you knew, I really did.

The truth always finds a way to come out, sooner or later. Honestly, I was at the point where I didn't even care anymore. Someone did it.

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BEULAH: When I was your age, I worked at the Grin 'n' Grub. Your daddy flipped burgers. I was the fry girl--and very popular. And, oh honey, I was a legend! Everyone raved about my perfectly seasoned and crisp fries. I was even crowned Miss Beaver Queen that year. It was a prestigious event! We had categories--best rhinestoned casserole dish, fastest pie-coolin', and for talent: interpretive log rollin'. I rode on a beautiful float in the shape of a pink beaver tail--'til it broke down behind the Dollar General. (beat) Politics, plain and simple.

Thelsie may said that? Oh please, it never matters who wins; there is always someone yellin' "rigged!"

(speeds up, animated) For my talent, I could've had a hundred back-up line dancers, duetin' with Reba McEntire herself, doin' double backflips into a champagne glass, finishin', in that champagne glass with the queen of waterworks, Esther Williams herself, in a synchronized water routine--while Thelsie came out clangin' pots and pans together, unrhythmically, and somebody would have still said it was rigged! My ass, she won.

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BEULAH: (on the phone, fanning herself)
You're serious?! Me? Featured in the Beaverton
Gazette? For my lil' ol' flower garden? Oh, my
stars—I could just spit! (beat, realizing)
Not literally, honey, it's just an expression.
Anyway, I've been reading your paper since I was
knee-high to a pig's eye! My goodness gracious—
Grandma Agnes would be so proud, she's probably
rollin' around in her little grave. (beat)
What's that? Oh, no, not literally! (laughs)
Never mind.

It wasn't five years ago I planted my first
pussy willow and boy has it grown something
fierce! Oh, I'm very proud of how its blossomed—
Hold? Sure, I'll hold.

(to TOMMY) Son, I'm on the phone! Don't be
fresh—it's too early.

(into phone) Sorry—some folks got the manners of
alley cats. Yes, ma'am, my garden's thrivin'!
Begonias, petunias, my clematis climbin' my
lattice so purty—My pussy willow is tall and
vibrant. (TOMMY giggles at "pussy willow")

(to TOMMY) You ain't too old for a whoopin' with
a weepin' willow branch. If you don't think I'm
serious, try me. You don't know violence!

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DELBERT: Oh my God. I feel like I've just been... dangled by a giant. This isn't really my style, you know? I mean, I'm more of a sit-down, read-a-book kind of guy, not... (looks at sheriff) THIS! I thought I'd just... talk to the person who owns that flower garden. Mrs. Bumpinpickles? Yes, hello, my name is Delbert Hotchkiss. I do not want to interrupt your, uh... awkward, yet may I honestly say, "entertaining" fight, but I have been looking to speak to you, Mrs. Bumpinpickles. About your lovely flower garden. I may have information you want.

I go to the local trade school, I maintain a 4.0 GPA, and I'm studying the magnificent beaver. I'm working real hard on my degree in .. Beaverology. It's a very... (glances around as everyone looks extremely confused) niche field, but I'm committed. Every since I was a very young person, I have always been drawn to beavers and other such wild creatures that run amuck around here.

To make a long story short, while making observations, which just so happened, I had view of your garden, and I saw it being destroyed, and I just wanted to let you know, as a witness, who did it. I hate that I have to be the one to call them out. I don't want to cause them any trouble. I would hate to think that I would be a person to cause any more division within your

group here. But... I think it is important to know, nonetheless.

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BUFORD: Listen, son. I know word gets around like butter on a hot biscuit, we live in a town so small that the grocery store doubles as the post office, the town hall, and if your lucky, a Friday night date spot.

I don't think Thelsie is really capable of doing something like that. Can't say I know a soul around here who'd do such a thing. Sure they got their moments when they'd trade your soul for a pack of smokes and a box of wine, but I can't imagine any of em doin something so... egregious. Egregious, that's the word, right?

Now, Lord knows I've been as wrong as a one-legged man at an ass-kicking contest, but that's just what I think. I feel it here, in my gut.

You know son, it's easy to get caught up in all the bad news we hear—seems like that's all they want to sell us. But the world's a lot better than it looks from all the headlines, but that doesn't sell papers. If you take a step back and really look, you'll see we've got a lot more in common than we don't.

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SHERIFF: It was a hot and sticky day, like it is in here. Anyway, there I am, confined to my desk, like a lady secretary. Now, I have to keep busy doin somethin' or I'll go crazier than a jackrabbit ridin' a bull. I mean, It takes a lot to keep in this top form and physique you see before you.

(Takes bite of DONUT)

Jimmy Joe Spunkmeister busts in, sweating and hollering. I said, "Joe, what are you doin', actin' like a fool with a poker up your butt?" He starts bawlin' about someone stealing his Porkchop and Tater Tot. You see, Porkchop was his prized pig, and Tater Tot his morning crowin' rooster. I couldn't fathom who'd steal a swine and a bird, but I hit the road to investigate, happier than a raccoon in a cookie jar to escape that desk. I finally found Porkchop and Tater Tot—they'd decided to take a midnight stroll and explore greener pastures. Crazy Carl had heard from one-legged Barbra, who had HOPPED over to Old Man Biler, who told her that there was a ruckus at his trout ponds in the night, keeping his dogs barking and his wife awake. Following the noise, I sneaked up to find Porkchop and Tater Tot splashing around, having a hootenanny! They were ready to get back home. They hopped right into the patrol car, and with a rooster on my shoulder and a pig in my lap, off we went. I even let Porkchop steer for a bit.

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SNACKCAKE: Oh hush. You know, I think it's called psycho-kinetic, or something... I hear things in my head... voices... Like angels lettin' me in on secrets for the greater good of mankind. For example, a couple years back, while I was takin' a patchwork pillow sewing class down at Laverne's Fabrics and Auto Body—you know they diversified--Anyway, when we came in on the last day to have our pillows judged—so we'd know who was better at life—Sadie Wilkins went to grab her little green apple fabric patchwork pillow out of her cubby, and—(pauses dramatically) Someone—overnight—had viciously snipped off each corner of it! Threads hangin' every which way. It was just a trajesty to behold. I mean, the woman had just been through hell and back with her husband. They were on Jerry Springer. He had JUST left her for—GET THIS—a "bisexual-twerkaholic-conjoined-twin stripper."

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TOMMY: (He tells the story with a bit of a mocking tone) Well, apparently when this lovely area was settled, it was all about the beavers. And no, not because they wanted to kill 'em or eat 'em—those beavers were left to their own devices. Turns out, the little critters had a knack for building dams, which, apparently, really got things flowing, water, that is. They routed it just right, creating this lush paradise perfect for crops, clean drinking water, and all kinds of ... Vegetation...and mosquitoes... And gnats... And.... you catch my drift.

But, anyway. That's how the whole yearly "Beaver Nation Celebration" began. A whole weekend devoted to the mighty and majestic beaver in all its glory. We've got parades, dam-building contests, and even a crown for Miss Beaverton Proper herself. Last year's queen was a real... go-getter.

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SNACKCAKE: I'm like a younger, hotter Sylvia Browne. And maybe I'll dream-vision 'bout whoever did this to Beulah next. I have the gift, you know.

(Suddenly stops, gasps, waving arms) Hold on... oh my stars... I'm havin' one--this - very - second! Stand back.

No, no! Not a stroke, darlin'--a vision! I see... a big man--a big bumblin' ogre of a man--mirrors for eyes, chest like a gorilla--carryin' someone smaller--a tender little soul... It's like a David and Goliath! (Pauses, squints, whispering) And... the little one... dressed like an Eagle Scout?! DAVID AND GOLIATH! I can see it! (snaps fingers, pointing) Yes! Right here! And now... oh my heavens-- Is that a marching band of raccoons? A flock of rogue llamas? A beaver apocalypse?!

(squints harder) Is that Aunt Edna on a unicycle?! (to no one) Aunt Edna! Tell Grandma I said hi!

(collects self) Oh this? It's my sacred RUNE-- (she pronounces it "roo-in"). A benevolent stone passed down through generations of my family. Many don't know this, but one of my ancestors was an unknown fourth wise man at the Nativity-- it was said that he touched this very stone to

the pinky toe of baby Jesus himself, in his
little golden diaper.

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THELSIE MAY: Oh, you mean the night that trollipin' hussy showed up at prom and took Buford... leaving me solo! And I did not "like" Buford. I was fine goin' solo. That was my original intention, I just wanted to support the BOTH of them. No one seems to remember THAT.

It was always, "Beulah, Beulah, Beulah!" Oh, did you hear? "Beulah was made head cheerleader! She could kick higher and wider than anybody else!" Knowing full well when she tried out, she wasn't wearin' a lick of underwear! Or, "Sorry, Thelsie, but we cast Beulah as Dolly Levi in this year's Beaverton Spring Musical. You want to understudy her? Her bust fills out the costume just beautifully! Oh, and her voice—oh, the voice of an angel!" My foot! If you call that SCREECHING' she did singing! "But oh, don't you worry, Thelsie, "There's always next year!" Or "Have you seen how smooth and buttery Beulah's cheeks are, not a blemish one! Maybe you should ask what Avon products SHE uses! You know her momma sells it!"

She needed more than Avon I'll tell ya that. I WAS Dolly Levi! I was charming, brassy, high spirited—

Are you dense? Ever heard of the Bechdel Test? It's about women's stories always revolving around a damn man. I DIDN'T LIKE BUFORD! For the umpteen millionth time...

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THELSIE MAY: Beulah honey?! Beulah!! Beulah
Hortense Bumpinpickles! Are you there, sweet
darlin'?! Oh my... Have you seen outside?!

(to BUFORD, on one breath) I'd be screamin'
"FIRE! FIRE! Someone get a hose, there's a
fire! Dear God Almighty, hear me now and send a
flood, there's a fire!" if there was a fire,
Buford! What do you think I am, a simpleton?!

As a good Christian woman, I'll pretend I didn't
hear that. Sweet-dear-lord-baby-Jesus-in-a-
manger! I just can't believe it! The horror! The
terror! The unmitigated gaul!

(Fanning herself) Oh my goodness! It's a furnace
in here! Hotter than pearls in a pawn shop!

Anyway... Well, I was walkin' up your driveway,
lookin' cute in my little outfit and Chanel bag,
singing Jolene pitch-perfectly with my AirPods
in-you know, APPLE-I looked over at your
flower garden and-I just could not believe my
own delicate little eyeballs! I know how much it
means to you. I would rather ram my
youthful, ageless face into a red brick wall
than ever cause you any hurt or distress,
especially over something you loved so dearly.

But here I am! where the good Lord sent me in
this time of crisis. Where I was called to be.
Serendipitous, I suppose.

Just such a tragedy! Who would do this! Awful, terrible... embarrassing. My goodness, and to such a "spectacle" of a woman. And she's gonna be in the Gazette... Poo. I'm sure you don't...didn't want... this getting out just yet, but.. ya know, it's gonna git out somehow. Might as well come from someone who cares so intimately.
(sotto, sending text) Send.
(Drinks martini.)