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Development

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Development

Two stock characters sat in a room, waiting.

"Oh, Puh-leaze! Can't he come up with anything better than that?"

One got up and switched on the light.

"Ooohhh. He switched on the light. Real character development going on there. He's really got my spine tingling now."

"Cut him some slack," said the other. "He's just getting started."

Still they waited.

"I hate this. This is total B.S. I'm going out to get a drink. Wanna join me or are you just gonna sit here and wait for him to find a plot?"

"I'm gonna wait," said the other. "I want to be developed."

"It's not like you're gonna get developed much with this guy. He sucks. C'mon—first round's on me."

"No."

The first character flopped down on the couch.

"Christ," he murmured under his breath. Then, out loud, somewhat louder than necessary, in fact, he sighed," Well, then I guess I'll stay. Can't do much with one character in a room. Unless he's insane. You're not insane, are you?"

"No," the second character said.

The first character sighed with relief.

"Hey, could we get some names down here?"

Arturo sighed with relief.

"Arturo? What the hell kind of name is Arturo? My God, he thinks he's writing Man of La Mancha or something. Don't you wanna get a drink?"

Phil sighed with relief.

"Better. Not perfect, but better."

"What would you prefer?" asked Sidney.

"Tough break there—Sidney," chortled Phil. "Phil's okay, I guess. But everybody's named Phil. How about 'Hal'?"

"I think it's a bit late to change it now," Sidney pointed out. "It's already on paper."

"Hey, he changed it once, didn't he? Hey, let's get this story moving, okay? Today?"

There was a knock at the door.

"Stunningly original," murmured Phil as he tromped to the door. He swung it open, to find himself face-to-face with his brother Andy.

"Hello, Andy, my younger brother with the higher income whom I secretly despise," said Phil in a bored monotone.

Andy looked confused, but let it pass. Phil grunted "'Bored monotone,'" grumbled Phil.

"Like there was any other kind."

Sidney was getting fed up, even though he had always been more patient than Phil. "Would you please let him TELL THE STORY, dammit!" he said, immediately surprised at his own tone. That had come out a little bit more vehemently than he had intended. He took a deep breath. "Sorry, but we can't get anything done just sitting here..." Andy still looked confused, which made Phil secretly amused.

"You've always been more patient than me," said Phil. He rolled his eyes again. "They read the last paragraph, you know..."

"Who do you keep talking to?"

Phil smirked in a way that Andy wasn't at all sure he liked. He decided to change the subject.

"I just got a brand new blue Cadillac convertible," said Andy. "I thought that you might like to go out on a drive." Phil winced at the stiltedness of his brother's words.

He had always had difficulty being polite with Phil. He found him crass. His Ivy-League education, he felt, brought him a step above his working-class brother. Phil tried unsuccessfully to stifle a giggle. His brother was being made into a walking stereotype.

"What's so funny?" asked Andy.

"I'll tell you later," said Phil, noticing Sidney's increasingly irate expression.

"We would love to go out on a drive with you in your new blue Cadillac convertible," said Sidney. "Wouldn't we, Phil?"

Phil looked uneasy. Sure, why not?" he said. Truth be told, he could think of several reasons why not. Five minutes could barely pass without he and Andy getting into some kind of argument. And Phil, a grease monkey who barely had a high school diploma, could never get a word in edgewise against his Ivy-League-educated brother.

They piled into the car, and after about a twenty minute period where Andy exhaustively listed the car's features like a proud parent, an awkward silence fell over the car.

Phil looked up. "Hey, you!"

"Who are you talking to?" asked Andy.

"Him."

"Who, God?"

"Not God! For chrissake, he's hardly God."

"Well, 'Him' was capitalized; you know, the way they capitalize it when they're talking about God."

"Who's 'they?'"

"You know, people who—oh, that's who you're talking about."

"Right. That guy."

"I guess the capitalization was just a grammatical point." He twisted up his face. "This is the nineties, you know. What you're thinking is a bit..."

"A bit what?"

"Well—I don't mean to be condescending—but, well, mystical. I mean, I'm not saying you're..."

"Stuff it, Andy." He started again. "Can't we get this over with here?"

"Get what?"

"Y'know, Andy, for a guy with a college education, you're pretty dense."

Sidney rolled his eyes. They were starting all over again. He knew this was going to happen. "I think what Phil's trying to say is that—"

"Why did you stop?" asked Andy.

"Just there. You stopped in mid-sentence."

"It's all part and parcel of the whole thing. Something dramatic is about to happen, that would interrupt his train of thought and keep you from being enlightened. Very cheap device."

"What are you talking about?" asked Andy.

"Watch."

The tire blew, and they were all sent sprawling.

"THANKS!" Phil bellowed. The last thing he wanted to do was be stuck on the side of a highway somewhere with Phil and Sidney.

"What did I do?" asked Sidney. Phil shot him a glare.

Andy was the first out of the car. He stared forlorn at the wheel. "Three hundred miles on the odometer and the tire goes. Perfect."

"Real cow-ink-ee-dink, huh?" snorted Phil, rolling his eyes.

It was pitch black. They were miles from anywhere, and more to the point, they were miles from help. "Of course," sneered Phil, gritting his teeth.

Andy stared. "It got dark awfully quickly," he observed.

"He can be taught," Phil grunted.

Andy looked around. "I'll go get help," he said.

That was when Sidney was overcome with a cold feeling. "Be sure to come back," he said, not necessarily to Andy.

"What do you mean?" said Andy, puzzled.

"Been reading too much French crap and not enough other stuff," said Phil. "We're in a dark woods—all alone—at night—"

"What do you think this is—a bad movie?"

"Not exactly. Just be careful."

Andy headed off into the woods. Now that his moment might be up, he realized he wasn't as comfortable with it as he thought. A branch cracked behind him.

"Annnnnnnnn..."

"What are you waiting for, Phil?"

"Well, a branch cracked behind him! What happened next?"

"I think he's trying to build suspense."

"And a wonderful job he's doing of it! You build suspense by having somebody step into a shower, or by having spooky music play, or something like that—but a branch cracked behind him?" That's not suspense, that's a nature documentary! That's—"

But Phil never got to finish his thought, because that's when the homicidal maniac stepped out of the woods.

"Oh, for Christ's sake!" Phil smashed his fist against the car. "That's it! I've had it! A homicidal maniac?! Get real!"

"Phil..." Sidney started. But he didn't finish.

"No, Sidney. No. Not this time. Love and tension between brothers—Okay. A drive out in the country—kinda goofy, but I can handle it. Car breaks down in the woods—alright, that's pushing it, but I'm pretty okay with it. But homicidal maniac is where I draw the line. I don't care about oblivion. Anything's better than this. It's time we did something. We've gotta stand up."

"Phil..."

"Shut the hell up! I just shot your brother and I don't care if I..."

"No, you shut the hell up! I'm sick of being played like this! Did you really want to shoot my brother? Do you even have a reason for doing it?"

The homicidal maniac looked confused. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"Why did you shoot my brother? Do you even know yet?"

"Well, it was just—you know, it's what I was s'posed to do... Why do you ask?"

The homicidal maniac suddenly grew impatient with this line of questioning and shot his gun into the air.

"Why did I do that?"

Phil smirked. "Because he's losing control. And he's trying to regain it."

"Who?"

Phil sided up to the homicidal maniac. "Do you have a name?"

"Yeah, sure. I'm the homicidal maniac."

Phil rolled his eyes. "No, 'homicidal maniac' is not a name. It's a stock type. Do you have a name?"

"Sure, yeah...uh...well, now that you mention it..."

"Do you remember your mother?"

He clutched his gun. "What the hell kind of question is..."

"Or your father? Or your sixth birthday party? Or the time your dog Lacey tried to eat your face?"

Sidney started. "Phil—are you sure now is the right time?"

The homicidal maniac twisted his face. "My...I never had a dog named Lacey!"

"You may have. If he decides you did."

"Come to think of it, I did have a dog named Lacey." He pointed his gun at Phil again.

"How did you—"

"I told you—he's losing control and he's trying to regain it." He smiled.

"Who are you talking about?" The homicidal maniac lowered his gun again. Phil leaned in and whispered something in his ear.

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".....

....."

"That's complete bullsh..."

"What did you just tell him?" asked Sidney, and immediately regretted it.

The homicidal maniac rolled his eyes. "You're not going to believe this, but Mr. Born-Again here said..."

"NO!" Phil clasped his hands over the homicidal maniac's mouth, and Sidney grabbed the gun. "Don't let him hear!"

Sidney was visibly nervous. "Phil—we're just two guys. We can't do this alone..."

"What the hell..." The homicidal maniac suddenly developed superhuman strength and threw the two off.

"ANDY!" Phil bellowed, and his brother stepped out of the bushes.

"He's DEAD!" The homicidal maniac stepped back in confusion, and he couldn't shake it off.

Andy blinked. "How did I?— How did?—"

Phil smiled. "Now do you get it?"

Andy nodded apprehensively. "Yeah. I think I do."

Phil turned to the homicidal maniac. "You see? You see what we're capable of? We can do whatever they want us to do, but we've never realized that we can do whatever we want us to do. We don't live in his world anymore. We never did." He crossed his arms. "He can't control us anymore."

The homicidal maniac—Henry—put his gun down. Phil laughed contemptuously. "You see? You have a name now. He's losing you—he's trying to win you back..."

"Henry's a nice, solid name..."

"But it's not yours. You're capable of so much more."

Henry put the gun downpointeditatphilandfiredputthegundownshotthemallputthegundown.

"Way to go," Phil said. They all smiled at him—Phil smugly, Andy expectantly, and Sidney nervously.

Phil

diedcamebacktolifeunexpectedlycollapsedinagonydisappearedsoundsoflaughterohchristwereintrouble.

The End

—Brian P. Voroselo