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Cancelling the Bunny

His is the only black house on Spruce Street. The walls, the floors, the ceilings, even the doorknobs, all black. Mothers used to push strollers down the sidewalk out in front of the house, little children from the neighborhood used to laugh and skip and run about on the little lawn just underneath the bay window, but that was before he moved in and painted the place. Now mothers walk on the otherside of the street, cast worried glances at the silent, shadowed doors and quicken their pace. Children only go there on dares, usually late in the summer, when all the safer games have been exhausted, and the time has come to prove bravery so as to insure a proper degree of respect in the lunch room the coming year. All that is fine with Earl, however. For Earl likes things quiet, and he likes them simple.

Earl spends most of his waking hours in the living room at the front of the house. Light comes through the big bay window, drawing golden lines down the black wall, and the television is usually on. There is a beautiful portrait of Wayne Newton, famed Vegas lounge personality, done on the best black velvet available in the entire state of North Dakota which proudly hangs above it, and if the light coming in falls on the picture right, there are two little rhinestones, one in each eye, that shine like the light of God. It really is a beautiful portrait, and Earl finds himself staring at it during commercials or when he turns the set off and just wants to think. Delores did it for his fortieth birthday, before she ran off with Anton, the professional bowler from outside of.... where was it, Detroit, or something.... no, it was Des Moines, Anton had been from outside of Des Moines. Earl had never liked Des Moines that much, his second cousin had died there in 1968, killed by an insane mime, and he just couldn't shake the memory.

Delores had left a year ago, and after he realized that she really wasn't coming back, pro bowlers make a lot of money, after all, and then there's the glamour, Earl had bought a load of black paint, a case of Cuervo and a carton of Lucky's and painted the entire house black, every tiny little part. It had taken two weeks, but now the house looks great.

Every day at three Earl watches cartoons. Or rather he watches the screen at three when the television station out in Canon broadcasts them. He can't really see the cartoons themselves, because last week he painted the screen black, just like the rest of the house. Lenny the mailman saw the paint-smeared screen this past Tuesday, and as he handed Earl a bundle of bills and the government check he asked him why he'd done it.

Earl stared at the mailman for several minutes, until the sweat glistened on Lenny's forehead and the nervous twitch he hadn't suffered since quitting morphine was causing his upper lip to dance like a puppet on a string. As Lenny was just about to turn and sprint back to the jeep, Earl finally spoke.

"Why did I paint the T.V., Lenny? Is that all you really wanna know, Lenny, Why did I paint the goddamn T.V.? Well, Lenny, the reason I painted the fucking T.V. is because after they cancelled Bugs Bunny, everything turned to shit, man."

Stewart Engesser