

# The Handyman

And Other Short Stories

by

JOHN ELRAY

**Part 2 – God Returns In His UFO**

**Hanguk Yoja Bangu Hato Club**

**The Handyman**

**The Resurrection**

**Twenty Chimps On A Plane**

**The Earwax Fairy**

**High Impact**

**Welcome To Red Square**

**Jackpot**

**When We Were Monkeys**

**Meet The Antichrist**

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## THE HANDYMAN

Twenty-four year old Brandon Skwiezochs knew something wasn't right when he saw people on the street greeting each other, not by shaking hands, but by fondling each other's genitals. Something was definitely wrong with this picture, a revelation that was confirmed when he realized that all the passers by, all the people milling about around him, had a tail. This was easy to spot on the women since it protruded from underneath their skirts but less noticeable on the men who had it concealed within their pant legs, with only a short tuft visible below the cuff line.

How could this have happened? He had been sent to the wrong place. Quantum teleportation had never failed before... at least that's what the technician told him. Brandon had stepped into the booth, had his parameters scanned and recorded atom by atom, and bingo ... all the data was transferred to the destination for him to be reassembled. The question he had, though, was where was this destination... and what place still had telephone booths? Brandon jostled with the accordion door for some time before it opened, allowing him to step out of the booth and onto the sidewalk with a sense of trepidation. The air was heavy with the odor of burnt something, a smell that he couldn't quite identify. This was no place that existed on the Earth he knew.

While Brandon was receptive to the idea of parallel universes, he was not an adherent to the 'multiple worlds' view championed by noted physicist and yodeling master, Tex Magmark. That theory stated that whenever a

decision point was reached, the universe splits to accommodate all possible choices and outcomes, which in turn become separate realities of their own. So if you were to drive to work and had two alternative routes you might take, one of which gets you to work safe and sound and the other which sees you killed in a head-on collision, then both actually occur. Your surviving self of course has no knowledge of your demise in the other universe which, incidentally, carries on quite well without you. The multiple worlds theory was just too much of a stretch for Brandon; to him it seemed wacky, but then again what can you expect from a man who thinks yodeling is good music. Having said that, Brandon was no physicist, so what did he know?

Brandon was startled by the sudden blaring of a old-style telephone ring tone coming from the booth. He was tempted to answer it, perhaps a good way to gain some knowledge anonymously, until he noticed that there was no telephone instrument in the booth. Before his eyes a human form, female, began to take shape and when it was fully materialized she opened the door, emerged from the booth and walked casually away with her tail wagging behind her.

"Son of a bitch," Brandon said under his breath, and he started to follow her. He slowed his pace considerably as she ran across the street to the other side screaming, resuming only when she was a sufficient distance away. He then also began to make his way across the street but stopped halfway as a voice yelled at him.

"You! Yes, you! Get back over here...right now!"

A policeman stood, hands on his hips, a scowl on his face, glaring at Brandon who returned to the sidewalk from whence he came. His uniform looked fairly standard except for the color – orange slacks and white shoes paired with a jacket of bright yellow. He looked like a giant piece of candy corn. The jacket's shoulders bore a crest, not of a city seal or the like, but what appeared to be the bust of a woodpecker which itself sported a crest... of red feathers on it's head. It looked oddly familiar.

The cop scanned Brandon from head to toe, maintaining a sour expression that seemed to suit him naturally. His gaze paused as it reached Brandon's ankles then his eyes shifted to meet Brandon's and the policeman's demeanor changed from sour to serious.

"Lift up your pant legs please."

"What's this all about? What did I do?" Brandon said as he hiked his trousers.

"Higher please." The cop got down on one knee and frisked Brandon's legs, then he stood up and looked Brandon in the eye.

"I was just going to give you a ticket, but I think you had better come with me."

Brandon knew what the policeman had been looking for... something which he did not find. At this point there was not much of a response Brandon could muster. The policeman grabbed Brandon by the collar and led him into the back seat of a squad car and before Brandon knew it, they were off.

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It was less than a full day before Brandon received his first visitor at the police station where he was being held. His cell was small, maybe eight feet long by four feet wide, not including the space taken up by a narrow bench affixed to the wall with a hinge along its length and a chain at each end. The cell door opened to reveal the silhouette of a short squat man against the background light of the cell block corridor. Brandon stood as the man entered and both extended their hands, the stranger's cupping Brandon's genitalia and shaking lightly before Brandon could react to avert the intrusion.

"Mister Skwiezochs, my name is Jonathan Berger. I'll be representing you."

Brandon looked over the business card that Berger handed him. It read:

Jonathan Berger  
Senior Partner  
The Law Firm of Berger and Freiz  
4110 Peckerwood Blvd, Suite 722  
6395889000214557

"Please, sit. You must have many questions."

Brandon nodded. "Yes. First and foremost, why am I in here?"

"Ah, well... two reasons," Berger replied.

"Number one is that you crossed the street improperly and number two is that you seem to be missing a tail and, as you must know, having your tail removed is a serious offense... a mark of the counter culture."

"I never had a tail. I was born without one."

Brandon wasn't sure how much he should divulge at this point. He would probe discretely until he had a better feel for his situation.

"Well, that may be," Berger said. "I've heard of rare cases where that has occurred." He gave a wry smile. "But I'm not a doctor so we'll need to have a medical professional make that determination."

"And there was nothing improper about the way I crossed the street. I was in a marked crosswalk."

"Yes, but you failed to scream as you crossed, thus depriving any blind motorists of the warning they'd need to avoid hitting you."

Brandon invoked his patented blank stare.

"Well if they're blind, why are they driving at all?"

Berger cocked his head as if to say, 'you can't really be that stupid'.

"I can see that you haven't read the Constitution lately... the ninety-second amendment. At any rate, I'll arrange for a doctor to come and examine you and I'll schedule a court date for later this week."

Berger got up and headed for the door, knocking on it to be let out by the guard. As the door opened he turned to Brandon.

"And remember, you're in good hands with Berger and Freiz."

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Three days passed before Brandon had his day in court. During that time he had met with Jonathan Berger twice and, at their last meeting, had told Berger the story of how he came to find himself in Bizzaroland, as

Brandon called it, since the actual name was impossible for him to pronounce.

The courtroom looked generally familiar to Brandon, having a raised judge's bench at top dead center, tables for the defendant and the prosecutor in front of the judge, a spectators' gallery behind that, and a jury box off to the left hand side with a large mechanical woodpecker mounted midway up the wall, facing the corner of the room adjacent to the jury box. The woodpecker, about four feet tall and painted in its natural colors, was made of riveted metal which gave it a ghoulishly robotic look, Brandon thought... like something out of a noir era sci-fi movie. Facing the woodpecker and mounted right in the corner of the room was what appeared to be a length of hollowed out tree trunk.

As the door to the judge's chambers opened, three men emerged – a unformed bailiff sporting the same crest that Brandon had spotted on his arresting officer's jacket, followed by the judge, followed by another bailiff. The numerous spectators along with the thirty-three member jury rose in response. The judge, wearing a powdered wig as in Brandon's home country of Britain and trailing at least a foot of tail past the hemline of his robes, ascended to his chair, looked around the courtroom and proceeded to seat himself. At that point, the members of the jury and the spectators took their seats while Berger and the prosecutor stood up. Both attorneys wore a three-cornered hat, reminiscent of those in vogue during the time of the American Revolution. The judge wore a similar hat except that his had what appeared to be a mask of a woodpecker's head pulled over the bowl of the cap.

There was great commotion in the courtroom as trials were considered prime entertainment and everyone was very excited that this one was about to begin. The judge gaveled the court to order.

"Mister Prostitutor, you may begin."

"Thank you, your Horror," the prosecutor replied. "The offendant, a Mister Brandon Skwiezochs..." the courtroom erupted in laughter, the judge promptly gaveling it back to order. "The offendant, your Horror, is presumed guilty of failing to scream as he crossed Red Crest Avenue five days ago, and the much more serious offense of having a caudaectomy."

A collective gasp permeated the courtroom.

"He intentionally had his tail removed?" the judge asked.

"That's what we intend to prove, your Magnificent Woodpecker Head."

The judge turned to Berger.

"How does the Offense respond to these allegations, Mister Berger?"

Berger walked around to the front of his desk and removed his hat.

"Please put your hat back on Mister Berger," the judge said. "You know the rules."

"I'm sorry your Horror, I was just demonstrating a little humility in the hope that it might influence the court."

"Noted," the judge replied. "Two points."

"I will attempt to show that my client, Mister Skwiezochs..." again the courtroom burst into laughter and again the judge gaveled it back to order. "...that my

client has a perfectly reasonable explanation for both of these accusations."

There was a long silence.

"Well, proceed Mister Berger."

"Your Exalted Woodpecker Head, I'm awaiting an expert witness who can provide detailed testimony that will exonerate Mister...." Berger took a quick look around the courtroom to see several smirking faces, "... my client."

The judge nodded. "And where is this expert witness?"

Berger once again looked around the room.

"Oh, here he is," Berger said, gesturing at a man sitting next to Brandon behind the Offenders desk.

"Well get him up here."

"Yes, your Horror. Calling doctor Antonius Poktor to the witness box."

The man beside Brandon got up and walked to the witness stand which was situated directly in front of the judge's bench.

One of the bailiffs approached the witness box and addressed the doctor.

"Stand on one leg please, gaze at the Woodpecker and repeat after me. I... state your name... do solemnly swear to tell the truth and not to lie, unless its absolutely necessary."

The doctor complied.

Berger looked to the judge. "If I may... your Horror."

"Proceed," the judge replied, waving his hand as if he were shooping away a fly.

"I'd like to deal with the most serious charge first, namely, the caudaectomy. Doctor Poktor... would you tell the court a little about yourself and your qualifications, please."

"My name is Antonius Poktor, I'm head of the Internal Medicine department at..."

"Okay, that should suffice. Now doctor Poktor, did you examine my client?"

"Yes I did; from head to toe."

"And did you find that he possessed a tail or any vestiges of a tail?"

"No, I did not."

"Did you see any evidence that my client might have had a tail removed?"

"No. There were no scars, not even old faded ones... no evidence of a past caudaectomy. In fact, a z-ray examination of his skeletal structure shows that he is not built to have a tail."

"So, doctor, I assume that it's safe to conclude that he was born without a tail. Is that correct?"

"Yes, that is our conclusion."

Berger started pacing back and forth in front of the witness box while continuing to talk.

"Doctor Poktor, in the course of your examination, did you notice any other anomalies with my client's physiology?"

Poktor hesitated for a moment. He knew the next revelation would be a bomb shell.

"Yes, we did. Mister Skwiezochs..."

Berger wheeled around, glaring at the spectators while pointing up at the mechanical Woodpecker. All were silent.

The doctor continued. "... has a linear digestive system, not a circular one as we have."

A deep murmur filled the courtroom. The judge removed his eyeglasses and looked down upon Poktor.

"You mean to tell me that he doesn't vomit up his excrement?"

"Apparently not," the doctor replied. "It seems that his waste is forced out through a hole between his legs... although we haven't actually observed that... yet."

The judge replaced his glasses and shifted his gaze to Berger. "Fascinating."

Berger then dealt his knockout punch.

"Your Horror, the medical community, as well as myself, have come to the realization that this man..." he pointed to Brandon, "... is not of this world."

At this point the courtroom simply exploded. Even the judge's gavel could not restore order. The judge reached across the bench and pressed a bright red button on the console which lay an arm's length away. In response, the Woodpecker began to rapidly pound it's head against the hollow log mounted in front of it, making what Brandon would later describe as 'one hell of a racket'. Immediately, the courtroom became as silent as a graveyard, it's occupants stood, faced the appropriate corner, and recited in unison: "All hail the Great Woodpecker." Then they sat and remained quiet.

The judge echoed the refrain, slamming his gavel on that wooden pad thingee that you get when you buy a gavel. "Hail the Woodpecker."

"Mister Berger," the judge said, "... if your client is not of this world, then where is he from?"

"We're not quite sure, your Horror."

"Could he be... could he be the messiah?"

The buzz went around the courtroom, albeit at a low level. "The messiah? The messiah. The messiah!"

"No, no," Berger replied. "He's no messiah, he's just someone that popped into our world by mistake... from some other world."

"Why not just send him back to where he came from?"

"Well, the problem is that I've spoken to the engineers at Transportation Control and without precise space-time coordinates we don't really know where to send him."

"So what do we do with him?"

Some suggestions were yelled out from the spectators' gallery.

"Lock him up."

"Put him in a zoo!"

"Crucify him!!"

The judge's gavel came down hard. "Enough!" The judge turned to the state prosecutor, who at this stage looked either bored or deflated or both.

"Do you wish to cross examine the witness?"

"No, your Honor. The Prostitution rests. Although we do still have the K-walking charge to deal with."

Berger, who had retaken his seat, stood.

"How can you blame my client for that when he's unfamiliar with our laws and customs?"

"Ignorance of the law is no excuse," the prosecutor replied.

"On the contrary, Mister Prostitutor, I think it's a damn good excuse."

"Ha! Lucky for him he didn't inadvertently slander the Woodpecker. And you withheld the medical evidence from me on purpose to make me look like a fool."

"You don't need any help making yourself look like a fool."

The prosecutor must have been hopping mad because he was on one foot hopping around his table as this exchange escalated.

Brandon looked back and forth at the two men and shook his head. What a goat fuck, he thought.

The judge's gavel sounded three times before he addressed the attorneys for the last time.

"Gentlemen, I'm going to dismiss this case and remand the Offendant into the custody of you, Mister Berger. Court is dismissed."

\*\*\*\*

Brandon was already waiting when Berger arrived back at his office from lunch. Berger extended his hand towards Brandon's crotch in the traditional Pekorian greeting, but Brandon managed to side step it. It reminded him of the Men's Me Too movement back home wherein a man would rush up to a strange woman on the street, fondle her, then say "Me Too", and run off.

"I'm sorry Mister Skwiezochs... I forgot that you're uncomfortable with our pleasantries." Berger motioned to the door of his law library. "Please...."

They entered the room which was festooned with bookcases filled with legal abstracts, case law, dictionaries and the like. On the wall, in between two of the

bookcases, hung an oil painting, a portrait in somber colors. It reminded Brandon of the seventeenth century Dutch Masters' work. The painting showed a man from the waist up, seated, with a woodpecker perched on his forearm seemingly conscious of the fact that it too was having its portrait painted. A small brass plaque affixed to the picture frame bore the inscription:

Our Founder  
Woodrow P. Eckhert  
Affectionately known as Woody "Wood" Peckhert  
b. 6250? – d. 6322

"This the guy that started all this woodpecker stuff?" Brandon asked.

"Watch how you talk about that," Berger replied. "People here are very sensitive when it comes to Eckhert and his legacy, and his beliefs."

Berger took a seat and Brandon followed suit. Berger continued.

"He was abandoned in the forest as an infant and, according to legend, raised by a brace of woodpeckers on a diet of water and predigested grubs. At the age of about fourteen... or sixteen, they're not quite sure, he somehow found his way to civilization. He ultimately learned to talk, told his miraculous story, and the rest is history. I guess it was natural for him to learn to walk on his own but flight eluded him until his death in a tragic attempt to take to the wing from the forty-second floor of the now demolished Crestwood Building."

"I'm... I'm sorry, I... didn't know," Brandon said, all the while thinking that this place was just as crazy, if not more so, than the world he came from.

A knock at door preceded the entry of Berger's legal assistant, a curvaceous female whose tail swished slowly back and forth as she walked toward a file cabinet situated next to the window.

"I'm just going to pull the Woodlawn file, Mister Berger," she said, crossing the room as if she were on a fashion show runway.

"Go right ahead, Miss Assworthy," Berger replied.

She opened the cabinet drawer and as she bent over to retrieve the folio, her skirt rode up just enough to expose most of her tail. The tuft on the end of her caudal appendage was particularly bushy and extended far up it. This seemed to arouse the lawyer. Berger nodded at Brandon and made what appeared to be a lewd gesture. Brandon just smiled in response.

As quick as she had entered the library, the legal assistant departed leaving Brandon and Berger alone once again.

Berger turned his chair around and sat on it backwards.

"Brandon, while we *were* able to get the charges against you thrown out, there's still the little matter of my fee."

Brandon started fiddling with the collar of his shirt.

"I don't have any money... except my credit cards and I doubt that they'd be of any use here."

"Oh that's not an obstacle, we haven't used money for centuries."

"Then how do your clients pay you?"

"We don't get paid per se. Everyone has a function in society and they just do their job. Me, I provide legal services. Other people grow food and others transport it, and others make woodpecker effigies. You just take what you need as you need it."

"So I don't have to pay you anything?"

"Since you're here with us, apparently for the foreseeable future, you should consider providing some service to earn your keep. Right now I have a need for a Handyman. Maybe you could do that."

Brandon turned up his collar, inverted the tips and began twisting them.

"But I'm not handy. I don't know how to fix things."

"You don't have to know how to fix things," Berger said. "Look, sometimes folks here have a problem that just won't go away. When that happens they retain a Handyman to resolve that problem." Berger stood, placed one foot on his chair and leaned forward with his arm resting on his knee. "You don't have to know how to fix things, Brandon ...you only have to know how to fix people."

The concept was beginning to crystallize in Brandon's mind.

"Are you talking about murder for hire?"

Berger laughed. "Oh by the great Woodpecker, no. You don't get paid for this, it's just a needed service that you provide. Let me give you an example. Some time ago we had a man in this community that was a perennial liar and a cheat. He caused big problems for

*END OF SAMPLE*

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