

Tell Em' Kilroy Was Here

By

Jack Shea

Introduction

They told me my IQ was 148 like that was supposed to knock my socks off or something. They also told me I border on being a manic-depressive which gives credibility to their believing I might be a great artist someday. They also told me I should utilize my time better so they gave me this 19 cent Bic pen and this 89 cent note book and suggested I jot down my thoughts about what happened in my life to make me take a razor to my wrists and bleed all over the sidewalk in front of my apartment building. I will do it only because this goddamned place is boring as hell but don't think I don't know that every chance they get they will be knocking themselves over trying to sneak a look at my private thoughts so they can figure out how crazy I am really supposed to be.

You may have noticed I have used the word they quite frequently. Actually there are only three persons I am referring to. I just ended that sentence with a preposition to get back at that ass of an English instructor of mine who every summer vacation is going off to the woods and write that best seller we are all waiting for which is going to knock us out of our seats and I just noticed this is the third time I have used the word knock in my story so I had better be more careful or my IQ will suffer a point or two! I should have said to.

The first guy is my lawyer Jack Walsh who I think one time had an affair with my mother which probably explains why he is representing me in the first place for financially my family is beyond embarrassment. Besides since the old man is dead who cares? It is nice to see the old gal with a periodic grin. Walsh is not a bad guy. I mean he is trying to help me through the courts get a nice place to stay while they dissect my brain but he smiles so damned much sometimes he is hard to believe.

And then there is Jessica Wentworth. Doctor Jessica Wentworth. Her friends and colleagues call her Jess but that sounds a bit mannish for me so I call her Jessica. It is some kind of new thing they have in this place so a teenager does not feel intimidated we get to call the doctors by their first names. She appears to be about 35 or so but looks younger when she is not playing her medical role. I kind of got this next information from this colored guy who works the floors as some sort of guard. It seems Walsh is not only cheating on his wife and my mother but is also having a little thing with Doctor Wentworth which is surprising since she is so young and attractive and him in his late fifties so I gather his ego is suffering and Jessica is assisting helping the aging Irishman overcome his male menopause but that is none of my business because I have my own problems. I just wish she would stop asking me those embarrassing questions. " Do I hate my mother," or " How often do you masturbate," and things of that nature and I want to tell her if I had some one like you I would give up this self abuse right this minute but the truth is I'm chicken so I remain mute and we move on to the next question.

When I first met Jessica she told me how bright I was just because I paced about her office gazing at the diplomas on her wall and quizzing her as to whether or not she really attended all these universities. I bet 99% of the people who visit doctors never bother to read those sheepskins and sometimes I wonder if these doctors really earned them. And those pictures they have of their families sitting on their desks of their moronic looking kids. I think I would feel more comfortable if they had a bowling trophy on their desks or something. Anyway when I first met Jessica she was wearing this tight fitting blouse and skirt. I still remember the blouse was a pinkish color with ruffles down the front and the skirt was black. At first I was uneasy because of her beauty but also I was intimidated by her intelligence. I think I might be somewhat enamored then again it is probably this puberty thing kicking in again. I don't know.

What I do know is that the three of them quiz me morning noon and night which brings me to the third person I almost forgot to mention; Doctor Friedman. I am not sure what to make of this guy but he always has this know-it-all glare in his eyes and before I can complete an answer he starts nodding his head up and down like one of those football dolls they sell outside Yankee Stadium with the springs in their necks. And that is another thing that bothers me! I mean it is only right that those vendors sell only New York Giant dummies. If they want to sell Green Bay dummies let them do it in Wisconsin and not in New York which is the greatest city in the world- so be it!

The reason I am not too sure about Doctor Friedman is I found out his friend's call him Woody. Now I know for a fact his name is Eugene so what's up with Woody? It is not as though his name was Woodward or anything like that. Possibly it is just the way my mind functions but I find it disconcerting to have a man who is supposedly highly esteemed in the medical profession running around during the day as Doctor Friedman and at night he becomes a Woody!

Dr. Friedman is a short fellow of Jewish extraction though not of the commitment to the belief the Messiah is on the way back. He told me and a matter of fact the only belief he has retained with any conviction is that everyone is screwed up but him. Most times, if I ask him about his tennis game, we can usually waste an hour or so with his dissertation on the fine art of keeping ones wrist locked on the backhand and lifting from low to high to achieve the maximum amount of top spin necessary to clear a net which is 3 feet in the center and 3 feet 6 inches on the sides (probably an engineering error) and on and on about a topic which bores the hell out of me but it is better than being asked 60 questions in as many minutes.

Another thing that bothers me about Woody is his glasses. He is always peering over the top of them rather than look through the glass. You would think a man of his financial status should be able to afford proper eye care and if need be not be too proud to wear bifocals. He seldom looks me in the eye when I ask him a question but boy when he asks me one his gaze just about puts a hole through my belly button!

Anyway I will tell you more about those three later but basically I am going to tell you about what went wrong in my head and got me stuck in this place. By the way, my name is James Kilroy and I live in the Inwood section of upper Manhattan but what few friends I have call me Jimmy. I am a high school student 16 years old and a part time delivery boy and since I am supposed to be honest with my feelings according to you know who- I am an alcoholic. There; I said it; it's done. This is my notebook for better or worse about what led up to that day.

Notebook-chapter 1

Five a.m. The grayness of it all. In a Limbonic state- not knowing or caring what is real or unreal- just drifting, drifting, and drifting. Good dreams bad dreams all uncontrollable until a noise forces the eyelids to flutter then open to the actuality of the whole- thing? For now, the subconscious controls all thoughts. For once a dream not nightmarish. Let me stay here and float and by the god or guru or great agnomen I promise I shall abide by whatever laws you have enacted for my soul to win this great game. Let me sleep. Let me dream.

- Jimmy! Get up now!-

That voice again. It, the voice, penetrates walls, moves about bricked corners as a snake moves about the desolate sands uninhibited by the scrub within its path. Always moving, moving, moving, and then the tongue strikes and the ear hears.

- Jimmy!-

The eyelids refuse awareness and remain intact. The vibrations upon the ears echo, echo, echo. Message not received! Five minutes more with my thoughts- please. It is so hard to go back to before. Think. Remember. Yes. The dance. She stood across the wood covered auditorium floor.

- Ladies Choice!-

He (I) stand in mortal fear of who shall pick him from the crowd of pimply faced vodka breathed half men. The humiliation of being left out, unpicked, rejection always the possibility. Let it be her. Girls on one side of the floor boys on the other. The drummer of the band, The Saints and the Sinners, rolls his wrists over the skins and the wooden sticks ratatata to his commands.

-Lay...Dees choice!

And here they come this pack of cats. The boys feet shuffle uneasily. Got to play it cool. Look indifferent. The ladies sashay intently. And then I see her. The queen bee Irene Dwyer with her black eyes and prominent breasts her skin color Mediterranean. Prize of prizes. Helen of Troy. Irene of Inwood! She moves in the middle of the pack surrounded by her court. The strobe highlights the raven sheen of her hair which cascades behind her shoulders and down her spine until it comes to rest upon the small of her back. The closer she gets the more ample her figure appears. Her chest endowed beyond her years. The most alluring of her features her eyes. Thick black eyebrows; copper skinned eyelids; Lashes extending to bat over brown pools. Her dress a white flowered cotton hugging hips meant to be hugged and lifted and lowered to states where two become one and the world around you becomes obscured. The neckline plunges downward to a tanned toned valley whose peaks may or may not have been encountered by an adventurous soul. The black Irish Venus of Inwood! About her neck an ebony choker white cameo in its center a figurine upon the throat where Adam does not lie. My Adam sticks as the heart beats faster and faster...Pick me, Pick me

One hopes ones imperfections are overlooked...the chipped tooth, the scarred chin, all mementos from the war in the streets. The half pint of vodka was insufficient to enhance his courage. He wishes he had a chicolate to disguise the crack in his tooth. What a gaping stupid smile! Vanity of youth. All these thoughts his but what of hers. Closer and closer they move these perfumed wonders of ones lustful youth; doused in their entrapments. Always daring in their movements.

Comrades? Together we mingle with our backs to the wall in mutual apprehension. We stand erect but cannot appear over anxious. Here they come. Straighten those ties and adjust the suit jacket lapels. Stick the left foot behind the right pant leg and rub the shoe dust away. Steady now...steady! My feet shuffle uncontrollably as she stands before me with outstretched hand. She leads me upon the dance floor and we are moving to the sound of twangy notes. The song is called Still. Her right hand slowly slips from my grasp as she pulls me closer. My free hand finds the small of her back as we silently move cheek to cheek. Rhythmically she rubs my shoulder and I feel the tenseness leave my body. Abruptly the music ends and mutely I stand afraid to open my mouth. She leans her head back and laughs and then pulls me toward her and kisses my ear and whispers,

- Why don't you take me home.-?

And then the interruption.

- Jimmy! Are you getting out of bed or not!-

So much for dreams. The voice now stands above me. If I had known it was coming I would have burrowed deeper and deeper beneath the itch infested army issue blankets. No exit.

-Yeah, I yawn.-

- Well hurry it up or you'll be late for mass. I don't know what's the matter with you anymore! You don't seem to mind your mother getting up at 4:30 working her fingers to the bone preparing this families breakfast, getting ready for work while the rest of you sleep away the day. Now get up! There is oatmeal on the stove and for the life of me I...-

The voice continues to drone reprimands as it fades to a distant part of this two bedroom dump. And what is this all in my head about Irene Dwyer? Everyone knows she is Ritchie Donovan's girl and no one messes with Ritchie Donovan. I wait a moment while early morning sexuality dwindles and becomes dormant for another day. I shouldn't have drunk so much the night before and I swear for the 100th time I will never touch another drop as I kick the covers to the floor and rise from my hideaway. I sit with my hands holding my chin and stare out the window cursing this woman who constantly interrupts my dreams just about when I am gonna do it. Across the avenue Leaping Lizzie paces back and forth in front of her

window probably planning another of her swan dives. She lives on the second floor and every month or so perches herself like a pigeon on the firescape threatening to end it all which might have greater effect if she moved to the eight floor but that's Lizzie.

- So, you're finally up.-

Is that a question or a statement?

- Yeah I answered sarcastically.-

- Don't you ever talk to your mother in that tone of Voice! She shrieks and then she growled. You hear me Mister!-

- I'm up ain't I.-

- Well see you stay up.-

In my mind I say why don't you go screw old Walsh but in reality I sit still staring out the window and squint my eyes so everything within my gaze becomes abstract and blurred. And then I start flapping my tongue like a dog lapping in some air and trying to remember where I was last night when here she starts again.

- And where were you last night,-

She makes statements, she never phrases a question.

_ Out I respond.-

- What are you doing squinting your eyes like that. And put your tongue back in your mouth and wipe that smirk off your face or Ill wipe it for You!-

- Aw shuddup I said as I ducked and left the room with the voice behind me ranting;

- You wouldn't talk like that if your father were alive!-

I slammed the bathroom door and turned the lock. The sound of the turned on hot and cold water drowned out the berating voice on the other side. With cupped hands I splash water upon my face then push my hair straight back and gaze at the reflection in the mirror. Someone with red eyes stares back. Turning on the tub water a cockroach tries to flee but I stop the water and watch the whirlpool twirl and take my fellow dweller of the tenement to his demise. I moved the laundry hamper and blocked the door and retrieved my Playboy from its hidden compartment and then the pounding on the door begins so I toss the magazine aside and flush for effect and yell I'll be out in a minute and rise from the bowl and once again stare in the mirror at this man with piercing blue eyes and round owlsh eyes and firm chin and I wondered why this reflection had tears running down its cheeks. I shake my head back and forth and the tears subside and then I open the door and out of the apartment I go as the voice continues its wail of "woe is me" and I slam her gob shut.

I could hear the elevator rumbling on its cables toward my floor. The car alit and I opened the heavy iron door as the door within slid open on its track. As I entered a woman's voice greeted me.

- Good morning James.-

- Good morning Misses Quinn-

I doff my cap and my arms dangle lazily at my sides.

-And what is that contraption you have under your arm James?-

It is called a skate board Misses Quinn.-

- And what do you do with it.-

-You ride it ma'am.-

-And how do you hold on James?-

- With my feet.-

- Interesting she replied.-

There were three Misses Quinn's in the building and before it became vogue the Misses Quinn's were career women. The three Misses Quinn's were Madeline, Mabel and Marjorie. Madeline was the youngest of the three sisters. In order to supplement her income from the music store where she worked she taught piano. My fingers were not built for the classical. Rather than being long and slender they were short and stout. The hands of a laborer but when she spoke I did not want to offend her efforts.

- Are you serving mass this morning James?-

- Yes ma'am.-

Do you plan on continuing your lessons James?-

- Its hard to find the time Misses Quinn.-

- One should always find time for the classical young man.-

- Yes ma'am-

As she smiled I could not stop staring at her beavered teeth and as usual her teeth were lipstick stained. While at her lessons she would often take a piece of toilet tissue and rub the front of her teeth clean. She would then slide next to me on the bench and together we would gaze at the sheet music which was a mystery to me.

- Remember it this way she would instruct. Every good boy deserves fun...E.G.B.D.F. And the open keys spell the word face. F.A.C.E.

Her finger nails were long and firm. As she would speak she would drum her fingernails on the white boned keys making a musical tap tap tapping sound which pleased the ear. She was a classical lady amongst uncultured slobs. A good woman. I would con her into showing me a particular movement and she was off into musical space while I sat and enjoyed the concert. But I could not tell her the truth about my musical ambitions so I stood there with my head throbbing and the damned elevator moving an inch at a time so I just answered yes to everything she asked which is what grownups want to hear anyway and that's all I remember about the elevator ride. What I do remember is jumping on this board my cousin in California sent me and riding and riding and riding. And then the pounding in my head began again so I rode faster and faster until I was out of breathe and had to sit down on a park bench and my heart was racing and racing and I was trying to gain some measure of control and just as I was about to relax in strolls Doctor Wentworth with that luscious body of hers so I hid my notebook as she sat down so I will tell you about the mass later.

Number 2

It is pretty obvious I am oversexed but that is basically due to lack of performance than anything else. It is not like I don't try. It is simply because in all honesty I am pretty classless. Pigeons in Central Park have more class than me but perhaps that is due to their proximity to the Plaza Hotel but I'm not sure. Like now. Jessica sits across from me her leg crossed and all I can think of is how I can cop a cheap look up her dress. Yeah real class! My eyes are twitching up and down. I know exactly what I'm doing; she knows what I'm doing; freaking Helen Keller could take one look at me and know what I'm doing but I can't stop!

- Can you tell me what you're thinking?-

Boy I would like to but I can't so my mind starts to wander until finally I tell her.

- A bench.-

- You were thinking about a bench. What kind of bench was it?-

Slats nailed to wrought iron. Hard and wet in the morning dew and I thought of the Jew. It was shortly after six in the morning and I am on my way to the church of the Good Shepherd to assist in the holy sacrifice. Change water to wine to the blood of you know who. I'm in Inwood on the isle of Manhattan. Last stop on the A train-207th street and Broadway and if you don't believe me you are from out of town. Bordering the north of Inwood the Harlem River flows separating Manhattan from the Bronx. To the east the Harlem winds itself south toward the East river once again separating the two Burroughs. Our southern boarder is Washington Heights and to the west the mighty Hudson River roars and separates New York from Jersey. Our encirclement is now complete. Take out a map of Manhattan Island and cut out this section along the boarders I have described and you no longer have a map of a major metropolis and now Inwood becomes a large village complete with its shops run by tinkers, tailors, and candlestick makers. And then you can separate the village by economic status then politics, then religion, and finally race....

She, Jessica, interrupts me here as her voice softly calls my name- Jimmy, Jimmy. She sat and again called my name and I could vaguely pick up the sound of her voice over the pitter patter of the rain fall in my head. When you drink this rain cloud follows you wherever you go. You get used to its wetness. The cloud encircles your body while outside its circumference the sun shines. You try to ignore the circle of rain and try to leap outside into the warmth; but the rain keeps teaming. I know it is up to me to change but the rain keeps pouring. She spoke again and made me forget my dampness and how chilled I was and how invaded my body really felt. And then this voice beckoned me toward truth; a world of self admission as to what it

was I was running from or toward and I asked her pleasantly if she wouldn't mind turning off the recorder which she did. The whirring of the wheels made my brain believe it was reel to reel. I didn't want to feel as though I was a damaged machine if I was going to spill my guts to some smart Doctor who in truth I hardly knew. But I'm a sucker for women. I can't think of an object more beautiful on this earth than a good looking woman regardless of race, creed, or height. Religious fanatics I can do without.

- You have to concentrate if you are going to progress don't you agree? Please, you must trust me. Tell me about that day.-

- I can't, just leave me alone!-

- You were sitting on a bench.-

- What bench?-

- Why did the bench make you think of Jews? What was it, six in the morning; you were on your way to church; you sat on a park bench and you thought of....=

-Auschwitz.-

- Auschwitz?-

- Germans, Nazis, Storm troopers!-

The old men and women who sat on these benches came from Eastern Europe survivors from people who would shove them in an inferno as nonchalantly as I would put my bread in the toaster. They would sit on these benches clustered together and speak in a dialect I found both strange and pleasing to the ear. Yiddish I think? The men always wore hats which meant they were either cold or Orthodox. As they spoke to one another I would notice they would never turn their heads left or right but rather speak into the wind as though speaking into a distant memory. Their eyes lay inward as if to gaze outward would be an invitation for unwanted strangers to enter. I imagined I could hear the sounds of different languages Hungarian or Polish or Czech or some other far off land and as I slipped a miniature of Southern Comfort from my jacket pocket and drained the contents. Their voices became louder and louder as though they were shedding the pain of their memories but for all I really knew they could be talking about the laundry man or the tailor or the price of vegetables at the A&P. But that morning on the bench all I thought about was the Gestapo moving down Seaman Avenue, sirens howling in the dewed morning and marching toward my bench. Black clothed figures with swastikas sewn to their arms and rifles draped to their shoulders leaping from a troop carrier and surrounding me.

-Ya vol. You are Kilroy!-

- Ya.-

- Your papers please.-

I hand him my copy of the Daily News but he is unsympathic.

- You come with me Jew!-

Jew? Who in the blazes is he talking about! James Andrew Kilroy is the name. Born and bred on the isle of Manhattan of Irish extraction. Mother from Roscommon and father a Kilkenny cat. Sure and begoran who the hell is a Jew. But when they want you there is little you can do. I scream and yell;

-Leave your paws to yourself you fascist bastard! I'm on my way to the church of the Good Shepherd to assist in the holy sacrifice!-