

SPAIN!

Okay, so really, none of this is my fault. That's probably the best place to start, because I know you'll likely be thinking otherwise before you've read too far into this and I wanted to state first and foremost that, no: you are wrong. None of this is my fault.

I'm in Spain. But that's kinda jumping ahead. I'm gonna do that, though. Jump ahead. And then back and maybe a little skip-step to the side, just for fun. I'm doing this to confuse you and telling you that I'm trying to confuse you to confuse further. But: Spain.

And so, I came out here for the saint-day celebration of Pilar, patron saint of Zaragoza. Fucking beautiful place. And for the celebration, people dumped gazillions of roses in the square in front of the basilica and the whole goddamn town smells like fucking flowers at this point, which is also beautiful, but in the sense that it smells pretty, not so much the look because the roses are brown and a bit wilted in the sun as they've been sitting there, piling up, for quite some time now.

That was the yesterday.

And today, we went to Oktoberfest. In Spain. Mull that over a moment, because the next bit is going to take quite a bit more processing power and I want to make sure you've developed that fully first. Oktoberfest: an auditorium at a currently closed amusement park filled with rows and rows of bench-table-bench-bench-table-bench all occupied by sweating Spaniards with these tiny, little versions of steins filled with tiny, little versions of what passes for beer here and some are singing (the sweaters, not the steins) and their favorite song seems to be (and these are the actual lyrics): "we're proustring; we're proustring; we're proustring", where 'proust' is the German word for 'cheers' often uttered at the clink of glasses before gulping down that warm rot that Germans pass off as beer. Lots of liquids passing here.

And there's a band. Oh, God, is there a band. Thank God for this band and dear, God, I wish another American were in attendance to appreciate this marvelous little feature performance.

Oh. Wait. Side-step: there is another American. Her name is Sloan and she's studying here for the year and the name 'Sloan' seems particularly difficult for Spaniards to pronounce, by the way; poor girl. Slow-Anne seems the closest they'll get. Like she's the fat girl in 5th grade who's always shuffling in from recess fifteen minutes late, eyes downcast, a dark, wet stain spread across the lap of her dress, proclaiming her shame and poor bladder control. Slow-Anne.

But, the band: a Spanish polka ensemble that seems only to cover classic Americana. That night they played:

- "Rollin' on dee Reeve", by CCR
- "Beedeo Kilt d'Radio Star" - I know, not Americana. One of these things is not like the others.
- "I Weel Survive, Ooooooh, Non, I Weeeeeeeel Survive"
- "Swit-Home Al'bama, Were-Skies Are Bloo, Were-Cummin' Home t'You"
- And my personal favorite: "Ecky-Brecky Hart, Mi Ecky-Brecky Hart"

And but, so right now, I'm sitting in a train station. Sitting because I missed my train. By an hour, which is nearly nothing in metric if I have my conversions correct. Goddamn Mussolini and his fascist Spanish counterparts. And the calendar at the ticket counter doesn't have nearly enough dates crossed out, which is throwing me off royally in terms of both time/date awareness and jet-laggedness, but the man behind that calendar seems quite agitated when I attempt to update the thing, though he melts indulgent when he finds I no hablo Espanol and now he's treating me as he might a child or old person (like, really old; toothless and drooling and faintly-scented-of-feces old) or a foreigner, which I am, I suppose, that last one. But how dare he treat me like a child, anyhow.

And the lady next to me, who's taken the last two seats in the waiting area is fat and lazy as evidenced both by her girth and her left eye, which seems more keen on wandering slowly south than focusing on anything in particular.

But, let's start at the beginning, now that you're all uncomfortably warmed up like a too recently occupied public toilet seat, and the beginning is New York. I stopped off there for three days before coming to Spain. See the sites. Wander the wastes. Watch the natives, all vein-strained and agitated over anything. A high-strung people, those N'Yorkers.

And at one point, I'm in this little wine bar and another tourist wanders in and strikes up a conversation with the waiter, recounting a tale of her own personal and shared experiences in the overlarge, insomniac, apple city and but most of what she tells is pure garbage so I won't waste my time with that. Or yours. Right. Your time is involved here, too, and I respect that. I totally do. I'm not just typing this out to hear the resonant, alluringly-gravely voice in my head blather on about nothing in such a soothing manner, I'm telling you these stories because I care. About the children. No, wait. About you. Because I care about you. And the children. Probably. Except for the albino ones. Those pink-eyed freaks are creepy. The stuff of nightmares. No wonder there are so many of them at the orphanage (which, by the way, is what inspired my new novel: Doctor Professor Herbert Strange, Esquire and His Incredible, Orphan-Powered Death Machine. It's a Choose-Your-Own-

Adventure and my agent totally think it's got legs. Or, he would think that if I had an agent. He would also probably be a she and she'd be on the older side but still really hot. Think Sharon Stone.).

But the wine bar: so this lady, she's here from Wisconsin. Or Minnesota. I think. Maybe. Doesn't matter. Point is, I was thinking about you just now and it's the thought that counts really. Goddammit, can't you just be happy that I thought of you during the precious little time I have here while wasting away at the train station?

And she's here from the, uh, let's just say the Midwest in general, and she's doing all that touristy stuff that allegedly-Midwestern folk do while in New York, and she's visiting museums and Ellis Island and wandering around in that big, green lady's head. The one with the torch, who stares accusatorially at anyone who dares enter her domain. Senora Libertad. Or something.

And, with a friend, she's visiting Chinatown, which, by the way, is a poor touristic choice, I'm thinking because most towns have a China-, so it's pretty much like going to MacDonalds while in Spain.

The MacDonalds here proclaims loudly, "100% carne de vaca", by the way. Not a claim that the faster-food American counterparts can make, I imagine. And the quarter-pounders are actually called Cuarto de Libro, which translates to roughly the same, despite claims made by Travolta to a jerry-curl'd Sammy Jackson as the two idly converse on the way to an enforcement gig for their crimelord boss and though they aren't particularly good, as far as hamburgers go, they both taste and look better than the ones you find in the United States, which sort of made me jealous and a bit incensed so I may or may not have performed certain actions at the time, which I shan't describe out of respect for your innocence and appetite, about which I am still feeling a good deal of shame and regret.

And but she's going anyway, this tourist, to Chinatown. Or gone, she's there, in her story and, apparently, it's raining, also in her story, obviously. Not in real life, nor in my story about her story. I think I'd know if it were apparently raining at the time she told the tale, or right now, for that matter. I do have at least that level of situational awareness, to be able to determine the local, meteorological state of affairs.

Stop interrupting.

We've so much to do and so very little time. Or, more likely, the opposite, but the worms are uncanned and inching away, much to the regret of the sad-eyed lady with the broom whose job it is to clean up that sort of mess. So, let's just muddle through, shall we?

And so she and this tourist friend of hers, they duck into some restaurant in Chinatown, any restaurant. This is an off the cuff choice made without regard to Yelp.com review or even so much as a glance at the Zagat listing: spur of the moment and simply to escape the rain, which is happening there and not here, nor when the tale was told and so they duck inside to escape the downpour and apparently the premises aren't the best, but for the most part they're just flowing with the go (and the rain, which is also going, as previously discussed) even though the place is sort of filthy (and I'm using 'sort of' kindly here so as to avoid using profanity, which is what she used despite there being children present. In the wine bar. And they're whiny fucking children, too. Daaaaaa-deeeeee! I'm thurrrrrrssssteeeee. Can't I have some? I want purple teeth, too! No, you little shit. This is daddy-juice. Go fucking drink from the toilet or something. You know I never wanted you, don't you? You're the reason your mother left us for 'uncle' Bob. You do know that don't you? I forget if I started this tangential somersault with a parentheses or not and can't be arsed to look up a few lines to find out, so I'm just gonna go wild and end it with one of these: }

I also forget what started that aside.

Glowing with the fo.

Right.

So, this tourist lady, on whose eaves I am dropping pretty heavily and obviously, she's in the Chinatown restaurant with her friend and the place is fucking filthy, especially the floor. Oh, God, the floor. She says that: 'Oh, God, the floor'. This floor is in such a sorry state as to require petitions to the Almighty Lord God Up on High in His Also-Almighty Sky-Castle Made of Cotton Candy and Clouds. That's the floor in this place, but at this point they're committed, these two tourists, as a broadly-smiling, androgynous oriental approaches with bright-white napkin draped over serving arm and it had apparently come to life and light from where it had hidden amongst the gilt statues and potted plants and red banners in the foyer, and its chattering about chef's specials and this dynamic touristic duo has acquiesced, essentially, to possibly consuming fingernails and rodents and poorly-disguised dog in their vegetarian chow mien, but then this lady, the tourist doing the telling (currently not in the rain), she goes to the bathroom in this unrecommended Chinese eatery (also ill-advised, or rather unadvised, but if this course of action had been advised at all it could only have been done so illy). And she enters the ladies' room under questionable advisability and there's a fucking pig, right there, hanging by hind-hooves from the ceiling, freshly gutted, sliced from gullet to genitals in a neat line that runs evenly between a dozen nipples and its just fucking hanging there, dripping blood onto the ladies' room floor, which blood then runs down the drain with all the other

public bathroom liquids.

Anyway, right after that, I passed a sign that said, "Divorce? Get Free Now! Only \$499!" So, really, New York is sorta a silly place.