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Red, White, and Blue

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Red, White, and Blue

David Rule

“Never go with a hippie to a second location!” my dad shouted, a vein bulging out of his forehead. I didn’t respond, I just stared blankly at my father. I was sure I’d heard every word but had no idea what he could mean.

“New ovens wash Kristen’s tennis racket!” he shouted louder.

Now that just can’t be right.

I thought a moment and decided I was getting nowhere. I turned to walk to my room. I felt a boulder land on my shoulder. I flinched and looked to find the boulder oddly hand-shaped. My father spun me around and continued shouting. I noted that with each passing second my father’s vein bulged further and further out of his face; soon it would droop down over his right eye.

Instead of turning and walking, this time I maintained eye-contact with my father’s forehead and slowly backed away. I was too afraid to even glance down, so I stared at the pulsing red worm desperately trying to escape his face. After bumping into everything in the kitchen, I made it to the doorway. I could feel my father’s hot breath on my face as he towered over me, screaming at the top of his lungs. “Now! Just! Clean! The! Ketchup! Packets!”

Hold on, that made sense!

“The ketchup?” I asked in a quiet voice.

“Yes! Clean your goddamn ketchup off the table!” my father thundered. The vein exploded. Ketchup went everywhere.

I rubbed my eyes and looked down at my shirt: no ketchup. The large kitchen table, however, was covered in ketchup packets that had been opened and tossed aside. My father stood, arms crossed, in the doorway, blocking my path to freedom. His face was bloated and red, as if the vein had flooded back and filled his face.

I barely had the energy to stand, so cleaning was a nightmare. My arms dragged across the table, sweeping the packets into a pile and smearing the stale ketchup across the table. I thought to myself, *I'll win this bet even if it kills me*. I had been awake for fifty-eight hours. Two more and I would win the hundred dollar bet with my best friend Steven.

After what felt like an hour, my dad got fed up with my progress and pushed me out of the way. He scrubbed the table clean with a towel, grumbling something about my intelligence; I wasn't really listening.

I ran my fingers through my greasy hair, the ketchup on my hand pushing my short bangs upright. I collapsed into a chair. I could feel the warm sensation of stale ketchup spreading across the bottom of my shorts, but I didn't have the energy nor the willpower to do anything about it. I shifted my gaze to the clock on the microwave: 9:13 P.M.

So close! Soon I can die a hundred bucks richer.

I stayed in the chair, and for the next fifteen minutes tried to calculate how many more minutes I needed to stay up.

I gave that up and started counting seconds. I got up to forty-seven before forgetting and starting over.

10:58. 10:59. Dear God, please make it go faster.

After what felt like an eternity, the microwave finally showed my new favorite number: 11. Instantly my head dropped, hitting the thick wooden table with a thud.

My dreams were filled with ketchup. The thick, sweet liquid inched through my veins. I looked down at my arms and could see the crimson seeping out of my pores.

I looked up from my hands into the mirror suspended in front of my face. I opened my mouth to scream, but more ketchup poured out. It dripped from my eyes and gushed out my ears. My hair fell out, and in its place was a steady stream of ketchup.

I tore my eyes away from my reflection and looked around. I was in a room of pure red: shocker. The thick, salty smell filled my nose. I could feel my feet sinking into the warm floor. I dove straight through a wall and found myself outside on my driveway. Ketchup ran along the street outside my home like a river. It dripped from the trees like small red waterfalls.

Rivulets oozed upwards to form grass in the yards. I slowly stood and looked around.

I heard a noise, familiar yet distorted. A quick yelp came from my left. I turned to see my neighbor's dog—at least I thought it was. It was the same size and shape but made entirely out of hot sauce.

The red-orange form charged at me. Its large body dripped, and as it came closer, more and more fell away. It crashed into my leg, splattering the sticky liquid over my shoes.

This is getting ridiculous.

“So you fell asleep, I knew you couldn't do it!” said a voice behind me. I spun around. My friend Steven was standing there, perfectly normal.

“I made it the sixty hours! You owe me a hundred bucks!” I shouted.

“Oh please, don't be so ridiculous. You barely made it twenty-four hours, let alone more than double that.”

My jaw hit the soft, wet concrete. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I was positive I'd made it the full sixty hours, and now I wasn't going to get my reward? Unacceptable. The hot, salty smell of ketchup filled my nose, up to my brain, and I did the only thing I could think of. My right arm swung out and hit Steven right in the jaw. His entire head exploded, spraying more red liquid all over. His body fell sideways and dissolved into the ketchup driveway.

I ignored what was once my friend, and looked around. The only thing I saw that wasn't red was the moon. Brighter than the sun, the moon stared down at me. Its beautiful, pure white face shone down. I stared as long as I could. It came closer and closer, larger and larger, until it blocked out the red sky and was the only thing I could see. I felt it slam into my eyes, filling my head with bright white mayonnaise.

I pried my eyes open and looked around. My vision was blue. I could tell I was in my room, but everything was an unnatural cyan and distorted. My ceiling fan swam and wiggled. My ceiling shimmered like water. I sat up, and the icepack fell off my face.

I dragged myself out of bed and threw on my favorite navy jacket and jeans. I'd find Steven and get my goddamn hundred dollars.