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## And the Moral of the Story Is

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## And the Moral of the Story Is:

by *Bosco Turk*

See, I had to go to this play, *Skin of Our Teeth*. Usually I'm not much of a playgoer. It's not that I don't like them once I'm there, it's the idea of having to go to a play—dragging yourself bodily to a building full of people who cough and burp and fart, and then stare daggers at you as if you did it, fanning the air with great sweeping motions of their over-priced programs. And then there's the clapping. You're expected to clap regardless of whether or not anybody up there did anything worth clapping about. And if by chance you *do* feel like clapping, it had damn well better be in the right spot, like at the end of an act—not when one of the actors forgets to zip his fly or the leading lady swallows a bug right in the middle of her big number. If you just haul off and clap in the middle of a scene, people look at you like you've got leprosy or something. Just between you and me, going to plays ranks just above gravedigging on my list of things that I love to do.

There was going to be no avoiding this stinking play because it was an assignment for English Comp. It was either go, or permanently piss-off my English teacher. I have two rules that I live by: IT IS BETTER TO GIVE ULCERS THAN TO RECEIVE THEM, and NEVER PISS-OFF YOUR ENGLISH TEACHER IF IT IS AT ALL AVOIDABLE. The first is self-evident. The second is kind of like how a junkie never messes with his dealer. Many's the time an English fix pulled the ol' grade point through rough times.

*Skin of Our Teeth* was playing at a theater that was only a three-block walk from my apartment, but it was raining outside; the kind of a drizzly, misty, reluctant rain that looks like it might go on for a few years, and that you always see falling on London in Sherlock Holmes movies on the Late-Late Show.

Fan-damn-tastic, I thought. Not only do I have to miss "Joanie Loves Chachi" to go to this thing, but I have to slog my way through a howling monsoon to get there. I threw on my camouflage raincoat, kicked the dog and left.

As I stalked to the theater, resenting every step and every raindrop that dribbled down my nose, I noticed the surreal quality of the night and how the rain played in and out of the trees, and how the gray of the air seemed to merge with the bleakness of the streets and sidewalks, forming an overall feeling of

vacuum—and how every stinking raindrop within a city block was making a bee-line for my face. My mood turned more and more sour. It wasn't a night meant for plays, I reflected. It was a night meant for Halloweens, or ghastly murders, or particularly ugly and vindictive divorces.

I remember coming to Bostwick Street. The theater was there, looming across the street like a nightmare vision from one of Poe's short stories. I remember resignedly looking for traffic, and sadly, finding none, starting across the street, my step less than jaunty.

Suddenly, I mean like right **now**, a truck careened around the corner bearing down on me. Only moments before, suicide **had** crossed my mind as I stared at the hated theater, but only briefly. After all, there **would** be other episodes of "Joanie Love Chachi."

I remember thinking at first that the driver of this car was screwing with me, because the truck, an ominous-blue Bronco, seemed to make a couple of course adjustments, like it didn't have me zeroed in well enough and was trying to make sure I didn't get away or something. Hell, I wasn't going anywhere. Have you ever tried to dodge a Bronco coming hell-bent for leather at 40 mph? I mean I'm **not** O. J. Simpson. I was angry that this jerk was playing games with me. "Asshole," I thought. Don't be **messing** with me. Especially tonight, because I'm on my way to see this stupid play and it's raining and I'm going to have to sit in that theater for two hours taking notes and clapping on cue and sit in this wet coat smelling like a two-week-old bath towel and waste a perfectly good Tuesday night watching a play I don't really understand and could care less about—and in general it's just **not** a good night to be messing with me.

This was running through my head as I watched the truck, when I realized that it was coming like gangbusters and it was not listening and did not care about howling monsoons or that I had a play to see, because it was going to hit me.

In that moment I froze, and I'm sure that my eyes bugged out like a terrified cartoon character's, and my stomach did a couple of full gainers while my heart decided to check out the view from my throat, and all that other cliché stuff, but mostly I remember thinking "Hell, I guess this is it. Killed by a truck while crossing Bostwick Street on my way to a stinking play. . ."

I didn't get killed.

I did miss the play. It was one of the best excuses I ever had for missing an assignment.

Ironically, it was a doctor on his way to an emergency who ran me down.

He'd been called from Butterworth Hospital, only two blocks from the theater, to rush over to St. Mary's to save some poor devil's gall bladder or something, and I just kind of got in his way. When he hit me, I just flew through the air for a short distance, and then kind of rolled for twenty or thirty blocks. It was a novel experience, though not one I'm in any hurry to repeat. The doctor took real good care of me until the ambulance arrived, which seemed like three days later. If you're going to get hit by a truck, pick one that's been driven by a doctor—preferably one whose insurance is a little shaky. If his insurance is too good he might just let you take your chances, thinking "Hell, nothing to get excited about. . . I'm covered."

This one had doctor's hands, the kind that seem to know your body better than you do, like maybe they sneak around you while you're sleeping, checking you out. He also had a doctor's voice that eased my fears and kept me calm. It kept saying, "Take it easy buddy, just take it easy. Everything's going to be okay. I'm sorry, I'm **really** sorry. I just didn't see you what with the dark and the rain, and that camouflage coat you're wearing. I'm really sorry. What were you doing out on a god-forsaken night like this anyway?"

"I was on my way to a play you mother."

"What was that? Well, no matter. How do you feel? Can you move your arms and legs? How's your head? Any pain in your back or neck? How many dollar bills am I holding up?"

That last statement really gave him away. He was checking out all the major sueable areas. Boy am I lucky, I thought. His insurance must be **real** shaky. I could hear the sweat in his voice.

The ride to the hospital was expensive but uneventful. I figure it cost me about \$63.50 a block. I wanted to walk, but the doctor with the shaky insurance wouldn't hear of it. When I finally got to the emergency room, I had to sit around waiting for my turn to be tested, poked, prodded, and X-rayed to within an inch of my life, because there were other more needy people ahead of me.

"What we got here, a kid hit by a truck?"

"I was on my way to a play," I muttered.

Some one in white came breezing into the room. "Hit by a truck on his way to a play? Let him wait. Bring me that guy with the hangnail."

I wasn't hurt too badly. A little banged up maybe; a few scrapes and bruises. I could

look forward to being sorer than a masochist's butt for a couple of weeks, but not killed or anything. Funny enough, sitting there in the hospital, I was more worried about the state of my underwear than anything else. My grandma always warns me about wearing clean underwear, just in case you get hit by a truck or something. At least I was **wearing** underwear, but the \$64,000 question was whether or not they were clean. **Dirty** underwear is worse than no underwear at all. It didn't bode well that my boots were off and everyone in the examining room could see that my tube socks didn't match. One was kind of yellowish-white with three red stripes, and the other? I don't even want to go into it.

As my jeans were painfully peeled off, I felt like a virus under a microscope. Would my underwear pass muster or not? Everyone sucked in their breath as the unveiling began. The tension was like an expanding gas, almost crowding everyone out of the room.

No sweat. All my worrying had been for nothing—they were semi-clean.

Since that night, I have made a few additions to my list of rules to live by: IT IS BETTER TO GIVE ULCERS THAN TO RECEIVE THEM, NEVER PISS-OFF YOUR ENGLISH TEACHER IF IT IS AT ALL AVOIDABLE, DO NOT WEAR CAMOUFLAGE WHILE CROSSING BOSTWICK STREET, and ALWAYS WEAR AT LEAST SEMI-CLEAN UNDERWEAR JUST IN CASE YOU GET HIT BY A TRUCK OR SOMETHING, even if you're only on your way to a stinking play.

Words to live by.



Untitled photo, by David Darling