

Funny Bunny

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Font: AmerigoBT @ 11pts
Character Spacing – Expanded by .25pts
Font Kerning Enabled
Paragraph Line Space – 12.5pts
Paragraph Alignment – Justified
Paper Orientation – Landscape
Top Margin – 1.0 inches
Bottom Margin – .50 inches
Left Margin – 6.45 inches
Right Margin – .55 Inches
1st Tab – .13 inches (left)
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4..3..6..7..5..3..2.

Ned Thomas *and* his numbers.

“I love ‘em!”

Standing there, at the base of the assembly line, making Funny Bunnies. It was an easy job for an easy guy like Ned to do: as the baseball-sized puffs of precious, white fur balls came rolling down the line, he and his coworkers would dress them with various body parts and facial expressions that made each Funny Bunny unique.

“Hey Ned!”

That was Henry.

“Hey Ned, how do you catch a unique Funny Bunny?”

Everyone at the factory started to chuckle.

“You ‘neek up on it!”

Bunny jokes... they were quite popular at the plant.

Above Ned, an electronic sign beeped monotonously away, counting the number of Funny Bunnies as they fell off the assembly line into the Transfer Bin. The meter kept two counts: a daily total and a running count for every bunny since the first one dropped off the line two years ago, making Mr. Fudge rich.

Mr. Fudge watched over his workers from high above in his office quarters: a dark figure, standing behind the window with his hands folded behind the back. Every now

and then, Ned would take a peek at Mr. Fudge, but only for a second because too long of a stare meant bad news.

“Enough.” The harsh, amplified voice of Mr. Fudge.
Ned went back to work, making Funny Bunnies.

* * * * *

4..3..6..7..5..3..2.

“I love ‘em!”

Ned’s job was Quality Control Inspector. As the finished bunnies crossed his path, he had only seconds to inspect the toy and make sure everything was A-OK before it rolled off the line, into the Transfer Bin.

Once, he missed a Funny Bunny, costing the company a great deal of money in the process. It almost cost Ned his job, too:

The guy’s name was Gilbert. Gilbert thought he was a funny guy. One day while Ned was performing Quality Control, Gilbert decided to turn one of the fur balls into a not-so-funny bunny. He buried it into the middle of a group that he had made correctly and watched with a snicker in his hand as the not-so-funny bunny made its way down the line toward an unsuspecting Ned Thomas.

“Thanks mommy! Open it, daddy, open it! I wanna s—“

The horror.

The horror.

The not-so-funny bunny was marked as an Example and hung by a small noose over the assembly line. A picture of Ned’s face was stapled to the monstrosity’s head and a sign to its foot that read, “How do you turn a \$1.29 Funny Bunny into a multimillion dollar lawsuit? Answer: Ned Thomas.”

Strange as it seemed, Ned didn’t lose his job over the incident. In fact, he was promoted to “Primary Quality

Control Inspector” two weeks later and was offered an even higher paying job at the company’s brand new plant in Mexico. If it weren’t for the fact that Ned loved California, he would have been vice president of operations at Mr. Fudge’s branch factory, overseeing the production of their new line of cuddly rabbits: RIP—Bunnies in the slaughterhouse.

Gilbert took the job.

* * * * *

4..3..6..7..5..3..2.

“I love ‘em!”

Ned glanced at the Company Clock: it was 11:55 a.m.

4-3-6-7-5-3-2, he thought, *only five more minutes to go!* He realized that Mr. Fudge was glaring at him and quickly returned to work, inspecting the Funny Bunnies. Above him, the bunny counter clicked monotonously away: 4,367,528 bunnies served!

Funny Bunny #4,367,532 entered the scene a half-second later at the head of the assembly line. Out of the cylinder from which it emerged was a puff of cool steam. The premie bunny was a pleasant fluff of precious white fur scooped up by Rochester, the Headsman, who patted it into a nice oval shape and sent it down the line.

Susan picked up the bunny and considered which of the various cottontails she would adhere to it. “Brown... black... orange... NO!”

White.

Down the line the bunny went.

Two beady red eyes, a pink nose, and frail little bones (arms and legs that would surely break if the bunny could walk or hop, save the planet).

Chester gave the bunny the hop-test: the bones didn't break. "Good!" He turned to Ned, gave him two big thumbs up, and sent the bunny down the line.

Ned glanced at the Company Clock again: it was 11:59 now. "4-3-6-7-5-3-2," he murmured, wishing hard. Below him, Funny Bunny #4,367,532 came to rest against the inspection block just as the counter clicked off the preceding bunny. Ned looked at the counter and his eyes widened with sudden amazement. He gazed down at the bunny, which had the same production number as his lucky sequence, and picked it up. Without so much as a breath, he inspected the toy, wanting very much to keep it for himself.

Did it pass specs?

"Nah!"

Into the Discard Bin it went (employees were allowed to take the bad bunnies home with them, minus fifty-eight cents off their next paycheck). Since everyone at the factory worked with bunnies all day, every day, for eight hours a day, Ned was confident that he would be the only one interested in taking Funny Bunny #4,367,532 home with him for good luck.

"Hey!"

That was Chester, having a tissy fit. He hustled up to Ned and pointed at the discarded toy. "There's nothing wrong with that Funny Bunny!" He picked it out of the Discard Bin and shoved it into Ned's stomach. "Send it through, Ned!"

Ned gritted his teeth.

Upstairs, Mr. Fudge's darkened form stamped its feet and shouted, "MISTER THOMAS!"

Ned looked up, terrified.

"IN-MY-OFFICE. NOW!"

Everyone stopped working. Susan dropped her Funny Bunny and slowly picked it up. Chester grinned at Rochester, who let out a really big sneeze that caused Susan to drop her Funny Bunny yet again.

* * * * *

Upstairs, on the desk of the big man himself, the nameplate read, “E. Fudge.” The boss sat facing the wall, his big leather chair turned opposite the desk, watching the news. The wall-mounted television was a flat screen improvement over what people used to call “the tube.”

In his lap: Funny Bunny #1. It was made during those crazy, early days of Funny Bunny Inc., when the workers were still experimenting with color. Mr. Fudge stroked the stuffed animal, grinning darkly when the door to his office swung open and a terrified Ned came rushing in.

Without facing him, he said, “Mister Thomas.”

Ned gulped, squeezing Funny Bunny #4,367,532 for support.

On the television, the news came to an end and the picture changed to a glittering bucket full of sparking, gold coins. A rainbow spewed out of the right side of the bucket into nowhere just as an announcer hailed, “IT’S... TIME... FOR... LUCKY... LOTTO!” The screen dissolved into an ornate game show floor with a beautiful, blond, bikini-clad hostess looking stupefied.

Mr. Fudge mentioned something about the hostess’ upper body structure that made Ned blush. With his eyes locked onto the screen, Ned chanted the numbers “4-3-6-7-5-3-2” over and over in his mind.

The hostess, Lady Luck, caressed the lottery machine with her delicate and peachy arms, allowing her upper body structure to be visible from all camera angles as she reached forward and punched the on/off switch.

Inside the lottery machine, the white, numbered ping-pong balls fluttered about like a swarm of insects seeking refuge.

“You know,” Mr. Fudge said, “the Company cannot afford to waste its assets on your constant—“

The first number popped into the release tube. Lady Luck turned it into view and the Host chanted, “It’s a FOUR!”

“And the way you stand down there,” added Mr. Fudge, “looking like a total ret—“

“THREE!” The Host held three fingers up to the camera for emphasis. “IT’S A THREE!” Teeth.

Ned bit his lower lip, closed his eyes, and *wished*.

“—and that nasty display of poor leadership. Do you know what I mean, Mister Thomas?”

“SIX!”

“Moronic.”

“SEVEN!”

“Sad attempt at what people call a—FIVE?! Dammit, I never win!” Mr. Fudge had a love-hate relationship with the lottery. “Anyhow, as I was saying... you are a total disgr—“

“THREE!”

Ned ogled the television. Never in his life had he come so close to winning anything! Even this job, which was given to him by a friend who knew a friend who had a favor coming to him from a then poor Mr. Fudge. That was during those crazy, early bunny days when the name “Funny Bunny” had yet to reach the average household.

On the television, the final ball came up. As usual, the director of the show turned the camera away from the lottery machine and spun it around the stage in order to hold off that one lucky player in total limbo.

The announcer cheered, “It looks like it’s a SIX! No wait, it’s a THREE!”

Ned opened his eyes and blurted, “Three?!”

“PSYCHE!”

Ned clutched Funny Bunny #4,367,532 hard, waiting.

“Whoever holds this lucky sequence is going to win a whopping thirty-six-million dollars, folks! And the magic number is...”

“FIVE!” peeped Lady Luck, hopping up and down. So happy!

“No,” the Host argued, “It’s a TWO! The dumb (beep) read it upside down!”

Ned dropped Funny Bunny #4,367,532 and reached into his back pocket for his wallet. Red-faced, sweating, and just plain excited, he pulled out his lottery ticket and checked it just to make sure:



“OH MY YES!”

He just won thirty-six-million dollars!

Mr. Fudge continued without notice, saying, “All of this leads me to my final decision, Mister Thomas.” He turned his chair to face a bouncing Ned. “I have no choice but to fire you.”

Mr. Fudge had a rather large nose.

Ned grinned.

“Ned... don’t.”

Honk.

Ned ran away, laughing hysterically.

“Putts.” Mr. Fudge rubbed his sore nose and squeezed Funny Bunny #1 with a dark thought.

Below him, Funny Bunny #4,367,532 lay on the floor, a heap of lifeless fur. Had Mr. Thomas taken the liberty to bring the lucky bunny with him, he would have become a rich man.

Beady, red eyes.

* * * * *

“Honey, guess what?”

HoneyBee Thomas sat on the couch, eating *bonbons*. Floral dress and gracious hips (well, she made Ned tell her that once, anyway), sporting a double-decker chin that stayed cool in the summer from flaps in the skin that insulated the icy manner she often treated him.

“I quit my job!” Ned was *ecstatic*.



Ned’s head flew back before he could have a chance to explain. HoneyBee’s mammoth strength was just one of the qualities that caused him to marry her, eight years ago. “Honey, you don’t understand!” Ned said, laughing despite the pain (having a *bonbon* stuffed up your nose is a crazy way to take a hint).

Behind them, little Gracie sauntered out of her bedroom, her *banky* in tow. If anyone in town had a large security blanket-to-body-mass ratio, three-year-old Gracie was the one. It was difficult breaking her of the habit of stepping onto the blanket and walking forward with a—
—thunk.

“Waaaaahhhh!”

“No Gracie, no... oh poor baby!” Ned cried.

“Now look what you did!” wailed HoneyBee. She groped for her daughter and carried her to the couch. “Yes, I know... Daddy doesn’t mean to be a bum, I know.” She gave little Gracie a *bonbon* and patted her on the *tum-tum*.

The fat baby cooed.

Ned, still recovering from HoneyBee's iron wallop, announced, "Honey, I'm going to buy you a brand new house!"

HoneyBee laughed at him. "Yeah, right."

"And I'm going to buy myself a brand new car!"

HoneyBee gave Ned her *serious* look. "You gonna buy the town a new Un-Employment office too, Neddie? Or have you forgotten that you no longer have a job?!"

"EXACTLY!" Ned said, beaming. "I have THIS!"

The lottery ticket. Those winning numbers.

"4..3..6..7..5..3..2. We won THE lottery!" Ned spread his arms out and proclaimed, "I love 'em!"

HoneyBee stood up, clasped her hands together, and cried, "Oh Ned, that's *wonderful!*"

Little Gracie burst into giggles, *bonbons* smeared all over her portly face.

* * * * *

Funny Bunny #4,367,532.

Into the Discard Bin it went (Funny Bunnies were never allowed to touch the floor). This one had and Mr. Fudge promptly threw it away.

"Folks," he told the Ned-less staff, "our promise to the customer is Commitment and Quality. That's the bones of a strong corporation!"

And so Funny Bunny #4,367,532 lay there in the Discard Bin awaiting a certain death.

But not for long. It became a fifty-eight-cent special when Chester clocked off of work and decided that he would take the discarded Funny Bunny home with him. "It's okay," he kept telling the lifeless animal, "It's okay. You're too perfect to throw away."

Chester stopped in his tracks and grinned.

Then, he kissed the Funny Bunny.

Standing in the alleyway of Funny Bunny, Inc., realizing his discovery. “It’s okay, it’s okay, you’re too perfect to throw away!” He began to sing it out loud as if the tune was a long, lost ballad found in the dumpster of a record company.

Now Rupert, who quit his job at Funny Bunny Inc., six months ago and had since become a loyal BunnyWorx employee, was a silly man. He charged right up to Chester from behind, slammed him in the back of the legs with a baseball bat, and took off running down the alley with Funny Bunny #4,367,532 tucked under his right arm like a football.

Rupert spun around, sixty feet away from Chester, to see if he was going to pursue him. “Good!” he said, sneering at his former coworker, who marched solemnly out of the alleyway with his head bowed. Rupert fisted the air and took off running again, but forgot one critical step (that’s where the silly part came in): he didn’t turn around *first* and his left foot connected with a large block of cement that just happened to be in the way.

“Oop!”

Funny Bunny #4,367,532 went flying through the air and landed in a puddle of murky, brown fluid. Painted on the

wall of the red brick building above it were the words,
“ChemWorx: Healthy Plasma-Enriched Nucleonic Acid.”
Those beady, red eyes.
Flicker.

* * * * *

“C’mon, Honey,” Ned shouted, “Get in the car! We need to claim the money!”

“Hold on, Gracie’s gotta go poopy!”

Ned slapped his face, ecstatic.

The family station wagon was a big hunk of junk with a license plate that said, “BUZZ.” Ned hopped into the driver’s seat, whipped out the lottery ticket, and gave it a big wet kiss: “Mwaah!” He placed the ticket onto the dashboard and tried to wait patiently for his wife, but couldn’t contain himself. He picked the ticket up again and gave it another, “Mwaah!” He put the ticket back onto the dash and twiddled his thumbs for two full minutes. He leaned out the window and slapped the side of the car door. “Honey, hurry up!”

* * * * *

In the dark recesses of the alleyway, Funny Bunny #4,367,532 came to life:

Hop.

Hop.

So precious. Hop. Fluffy white fur. Hop. Delicate bones. Hop. It bounced out of the alleyway and onto the street, hop, barely missing automobiles as they zipped back and forth, unaware.

It hopped around the street corner, sniffed the air, and hopped into the middle of a busy intersection into the path of a car. Fear washed over the Funny Bunny. It started to thump it’s hind leg in gross anticipation.

The license plate said, “BUZZ.”

* * * * *

Driving through town, happy as can be, Ned and his family headed toward KTVG, the television station that

hosted the lottery. Behind him, little Gracie stood on her tiptoes and peered over her mother's mountainous left shoulder at the world and that which existed beyond.

Gracie loved driving. There was something about the way everything moved around her that intrigued the little girl. She pointed at the windshield and exclaimed, "DADDY DON'T HIT THE BUNNY!"

Ned *instinctively* pumped the brakes.

* * * * *

"I'm sure you'll find this car to be your very best buy," the used car salesman told Ned, four years ago, "It has A.B.S."

Ned remembered pumping those brakes.

"Dear," HoneyBee said, chuckling, "They're A.B.S. brakes: you don't pump, you squeeze!"

* * * * *

That was the past. Today, Ned (in all his excitement over winning the lottery) forgot that he wasn't supposed to pump anti-lock brakes. The hot and windy, desert down always had sandy streets.

The BUZZ-mobile skidded into an arc and stopped sideways on the street. Gracie pointed at Funny Bunny #4,367,532, which hopped out from underneath the car, unscathed. All seemed well until HoneyBee announced the approach of a sanitation truck, barreling its way toward them from the right side.

To the left: a delivery van carrying a load of fine meats and cheeses wheeled its way toward them.

"Ned, do something."

Ned slammed the gas pedal and shrieked when the car coughed, sputtered, and died. “NO!” he wailed, trying to start it again, pumping the gas pedal, smelling fuel. “Start, (beep), start!” Eyeballing the approaching truck and van as they loomed closer and closer.

“EVERYONE OUTTA THE CAR!”

The doors flung open and Ned scrambled out. HoneyBee followed with little Gracie tucked safely under her right forearm. They watched from the sidewalk, horrified, as the BUZZ-mobile became a worsened hunk of junk:

The sanitation truck hit first, tires squealing for purchase as it plowed into the side of the station wagon. The BUZZ-mobile crumpled from the impact and basically hopped into a diagonal position on the street, steam curling from its battered front end.

Now the delivery van: its driver drummed happily on the steering wheel, head bowed with headphones blaring his favorite tune. It wasn’t until the world around him changed into a rush of rapid, shifting color that he realized what the (beep) was going on.

The delivery van nailed the hind side of the BUZZ-mobile and launched into the air.

Gracie pointed to the sky.

—the van hit the ground on all four wheels with a loud BANG! that sent a hamhock flying into the doors of a vegetarian restaurant.

(ooh...)

A chunk of Limburger plopped into a street side saxophone, throwing its musician out of key. *Way out of key.*

The driver of the van peered out of the window, mentioned something about his boss, his rump, and burning rubber. A second later he peeled out of sight.

Now the BUZZ-mobile had taken quite a beating from the impacts. It lay on its right side, the left-front wheel spinning with a squeak and a squawk that meant only one thing to Ned Thomas:

“Guess we can’t trade ‘er in anymore!”

HoneyBee chuckled at Ned’s dark humor.

Ned reached for his wallet and pulled out a five-dollar bill. “Oops.” He fumbled for the lottery ticket and realized with a squelch that his ticket to riches was still—
—in the car.

“Ned, come back! You’ll get hurt!”

Ned clambered for the wreckage, climbed up its underside, and peered at the front seat. Waves of heat lashed out at the forty-year-old from a small fire that had burst to life in the engine compartment.

Got to... have to... get that ticket!

There it was, lying safely on the passenger seat.

Ned sighed with relief and groped through the window, his arms fanning the air; but to his dismay his fingers only came within inches of the lottery ticket. “I... can’t... reach it!”

He pulled himself out of the window, turned to HoneyBee, and wailed, “I CAN’T REACH IT!” He turned back to the ticket and shrieked, “NO!”

FIRE: a tiny flame came to life on the dashboard and danced its way toward the lottery ticket.

Blowing puffs of air at the ticket.

Its flame zipped stealthily along the passenger seat, waltzing around those winning numbers like a mischievous ghost. Ned’s attempt to dampen the flame with frantic breaths brought it even *closer* and he watched, horrified, as it caressed the edge of the ticket, vaporizing it into a pile of useless ash a second later.

He just stared at it for a while, the color draining from his face.

“NED!,” HoneyBee wailed, “Ned, please come back!”

Beyond the wreckage, Funny Bunny #4,367,532 hopped safely into the distance.

Ned pulled himself out of the car and spotted the little bunny. His placid face became red like a beet, as he shook with violent rage turned toward a big blue sky.

“Nooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!”

* * * * *

“Of course we don’t keep duplicates of lottery tickets, Mr. Thomas,” the clerk told him. “It’s to prevent fraud, gosh!”

“But I always play these numbers, Glen, you know that!”
HoneyBee was right at his side. Gracie yawned.

“Sorry, Mr. Thomas. No ticket, no money.” The clerk went back to work, scribbling on a notepad.

“But—“

“Good day, Mr. Thomas.”

* * * * *

“Mr. Fudge, can I please have my job back?”

Chester thought it was kind of funny watching the two shadowy figures upstairs from his position below as the new Primary Quality Control Inspector.

The larger Mr. Fudge leaned into Ned’s face with a finger and shook it scornfully. “You didn’t say ‘perty please.’”

“Perty—“

Honk.

Ned stormed out of the factory, grasping his nose.

* * * * *

The next day, a brown package arrived in the mail. Ned had been sitting by the window all day long, muttering

something about bunny rabbits. HoneyBee approached him with the package and said, "Here, sweetie."

"To: Ned Thomas," it said, "From: E. Fudge."

The 'E' stood for Edward (and having something sent from "E. Fudge" and not "Mr. Fudge" indicated that this package was very important).

Ned opened the package carefully, wishfully.

It was a Funny Bunny.

Ned screamed.

* * * * *

Bunny this. Bunny that. "I HATE FUNNY BUNNIES!" Visions of making them, day after day. "THEY TOOK ALL OF MY MONEY AWAY!"

HoneyBee tried to console her husband by patting him on the back.

"I am an idiot!" he said.

HoneyBee sighed. "It's okay, dear."

"If I ever see another bunny rabbit, I'm going to—" He garbled the rest of his sentence into the palms of his sweaty hands.

Months came, went.

* * * * *

Easter.

* * * * *

“I didn’t want to commit him, Mom, but I had no choice.” HoneyBee strolled through the house with the phone on her shoulder, Gracie on her hip. “Ned flipped out when the Easter Bunny stopped by to give Gracie some candy. No, not the real one! It’s a preschool thing.”

“Wah wuh ner orner wah wuh wuh!” Ned’s mother wailed.

“It’s okay, Mom. I’ve taken him— Mom.” HoneyBee sighed. “It’s called Funnies Anonymous. He’ll be okay there, I promise. Yes Mom. I love you too, Mom. Ned will be okay, Mom, I promise. Goodbye *mother*.”

* * * * *

Funnies Anonymous was a two-story complex situated in the foothills of eastern California. A pleasant view accompanied the building’s west side: a sparkling stream of crystal clear water trickled through a green country meadow. The sun was shiny-bright and the trees fluttered with nice, cool breezes as the animals of the land came out to play.

It was such a happy day!
Outside.

* * * * *

4...3...6...7...5...3...(6)...3...(5)

“NO!” Ned shouted, “It’s a TWO! The dumb bitch read it upside down!”

I love ‘em!

He erupted into roaring laughter and realized, again, where he was. No more laughter. Ned snuggled into the corner of the mostly-white, padded cell, and tried to

scratch his nose to no avail: the suit that they had put him in prevented him from using his arms and legs. It was a warm, almost cuddly suit, but still he desperately needed to scratch his nose.

Down he went, rubbing his face into the soft, snot-ridden floor of his prison, scratching and scratching and scratching.

“He makes an interesting case study, wouldn’t you say?” said Dr. Loone to his assistant, Buddy. They were standing outside Ned’s door, looking at him through a small *Plexi-Glass* window. “To think that this man has such a negative fixation on rabbits is... well it’s just plain crazy!”

Buddy nodded and added, “But he is getting better.”

Dr. Loone wrinkled his bushy, white eyebrows. “How do you mean?”

Buddy withdrew a Funny Bunny and motioned for the doctor to open the door...

“I’m not sure that’s a good idea, Mr. Barnes,” the doctor warned. “This patient is seriously hostile toward rabbits!”

Inside the cell, Ned finished scratching his nose and lay on his right side, wheezing. The door made a creaking sound and he held his breath, eyeing the opening with steely eyes.

Something white, fluffy, and just plain cute was thrown inside.

Everything went black.

“See?” a distant voice said, “He doesn’t rip them apart anymore!”

* * * * *

Months later, Dr. Loone finally agreed to allow Ned some fresh air. They placed him in the courtyard on the west side of the complex and removed his straight jacket. He sat there in a chair by the water fountain, enjoying the

fresh smells of the countryside. It was then that he realized that if he was ever going to get out of this place, he was going to have to play their game.

He started telling bunny jokes, really sick ones that made Dr. Loone more aware of Ned's acute problem:

"Why didn't the bunny cross the road?" Ned asked.

Buddy Barnes braced his stomach and said, "I dunno."

"Because it didn't make it! HA HA HA HA HA!"

"What do you call a bunny with an embolism?"

"Shut the door, Barnes, shut the door now!"

* * * * *

The day finally came when Ned could face a bunny and not foam at the mouth.

"I do believe, Mr. Thomas, that if you keep this up, you'll be out of here in no time."

Staring right into the eyes of a Funny Bunny. There was a trick to it. *It's not a rabbit*, he told himself, *no no no... It's nothing more than a clump of fur shaped into what RESEMBLED a rabbit.*

"Hug the Funny Bunny, Ned."

It was soft... so soft... Ned pretended it was a pillow. That's all... JUST a pillow.

* * * * *

"My name is Ned Thomas, and I am a Funny."

The patients of Funnies Anonymous ("guests" as they insisted being called) were having the Tuesday Night Meeting. All of those allowed to attend were seated in a large auditorium the size of a basketball court. One by one, members that had reached Step Two of the recovery

process (acceptance over denial) would confess their anxieties to their peers.

“My name is Ardent Summers and I am a Funny.”

“My name is Norm Johnson and I am a Funny.”

Tonight was Ned’s turn to release his anxieties, to tell them about his problem and how he planned to cure himself. “I have,” Ned choked, “I have a problem.”

The audience fell silent. All eyes were on Ned Thomas.

“I despise bunny rabbits.” Ned cleared his throat and stepped closer to the microphone, nodding at Dr. Loone who told him to do so because he wasn’t speaking loud enough. “It all began with my job, yes, making toy rabbits.”

He stood up there and relayed the whole story to them. How he made Funny Bunnies. How he won the lottery. How he lost the ticket in a fire. For the first time, Ned felt comfortable talking about his problem. It didn’t take long for him to realize that group therapy was the *ticket!* to his cure. The beads of sweat that had earlier formed on his brow were now gone as Ned brought his speech to a heartwarming ending.

“Easter will never be the same again.” He looked up, tears welling in his eyes. “Help me,” he said, arms outstretched, nodding as he spoke, “Help me... help me... Help. Me.”

Someone stood up in the audience and shouted, “Cure yourself! Cure yourself!”

One by one, others stood and chanted in unison, “Cure yourself! Cure yourself!”

“How?” cried Ned, frantic. “HOW?!”

“TAKE HIM TO THE BOOTH!”

Ned’s mouth dropped open. “The WHAT?!”

“THE BOOTH! GO TO THE SOURCE OF YOUR PROBLEM AND CONFRONT IT! ALL OF YOUR ANXIETY, ALL OF YOUR PAIN! MAKE THE FUNNY IN YOU GO AWAY! TO THE BOOTH... THE BOOTH... THE BOOTH!”

“What the hell is ‘THE BOOTH’?!”

* * * * *

Ned Thomas 'neeked up to Funny Bunny #4,367,532, grabbed it, and ran away, laughing.

* * * * *

The Loneliest Road In America. For miles and miles east, this strip of hot, dry asphalt baked quietly in the desert sun. A car would pass here and there, but not many, as this was truly the loneliest road. Sagebrush and dirt surrounded the highway for as far as the eye could see. The sun pierced the sky and roasted the valley floor with summertime.

“Easy fella.”

Ned gently placed the Funny Bunny in the middle of the highway and patted its small, oval head. The bunny sat there, a heap of precious white fur, the weight of its body sinking into its own pillowy fluff. Its beady, red eyes blinked and soft, pink nose twitched for moisture.

“YES!”

Ned took off running like a madman down the road. A second later a car slammed shut, followed by the sound of a twelve-cylinder engine catching and revving with awesome power.

Funny Bunny #4,367,532's right ear twitched.

Tires squealing into the distance.

Ned floored the gas pedal of his black Lamborghini Countache from hell and fisted the rear view mirror. He watched his little precious zip quickly into the background as he roared toward a road marker three miles away.

“YES!”

He slammed the brakes and arced the sports car one hundred and eighty degrees to a squealing stop. The Lamborghini reeled backwards and braked in line with a lime powder mark that Ned had painted on the road only minutes ago. He stepped out of the car and could barely see his little pretty, so far away now, a faint white dot on the hot, black asphalt.

The Funny Bunny just sat there, waiting for death. Ned fisted the air. "YES!"

* * * * *

"How long do plan to leave him in there, Doc?"

Dr. Loone and Buddy Barnes were standing outside the Booth: a ten-foot-square room with a small *Plexi-Glass* window on its door. Peering into the room, they could see their patient, Ned Thomas, sitting in a padded chair. Upon his head was a thick, black helmet with wires trailing to a computer console in an adjoining room.

Every now and then, Ned would twitch. His eyes raced back and forth in REM state, dreaming. The computer gave Ned the ability to control the outcome of his dreams.

"Doc," Buddy said, "You can't leave him in there forever."

* * * * *

Ned stomped the gas pedal, grinning as the Countache exploded into a vicious roar of squealing rubber and flying asphalt. Sitting there, on the road, going nowhere, power braking.

He released the brakes and held on tight.

“Mr. Barnes,” said a far away voice, “Every man has to deal with his anxieties and Mr. Thomas is certainly no exception.”

Ned punched the stick shift into the next gear and flexed the gas pedal. Knuckle bones white on the steering wheel, doing a hundred and eighty, eyeing that little white dot like he had never eyed it before.

Funny Bunny #4,367,532 started to thump it’s hind leg in fear.

Ned shifted, wicked gleam in his eye.

“Let him dream,” said the faraway voice. “Lord knows what he’s doing inside that skull of his, but one thing’s for sure: he’s finally a happy man. So let him dream his dream.”

“Wanna *hare* a bunny joke, Doc?”

“Very funny, Barnes, very funny.”

THE END

From the Writer:

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Your Friend,

Raymond
(Modder Paul ScamBaits)