Dead Uncle

by Smiley McGrouchpants, Jr-Esq-III

Roy owned the only drive-thru funeral business in Maine. Competition was getting fierce, though, from businesses springing up out of Massachusetts.

Roy sighed. *Somethin' always was weird about that Massachusetts . . .*

They had made “time machines” in Seattle that enabled people from Massachusetts to transport themselves across the country. No-one knew why people from Massachusetts were so inclined to do this, but there you have it.
Some say it was the shape of the end of the state — with a curled arm, like the Arm & Hammer® logo, at the end. Some said this made people mad. Bonkers, even.

Roy didn't like to get into other people's business. He had his hands full already with bus-, van-, and carloads of stiffs comin' in through the drive-thru window. People respected that. It was in the nature of the line of work — it was already so deeply personal, so far past warranting commenting on, that the only tack to take was to maintain a respectful distance. Particularly with Roy's business, with less crying going on than unloading an unwanted older relative who'd burdened the youth with their presence and blocked their hopes, dreams and aspirations. When Roy had seen the first of the movies in his dorm's weekend double feature that night (the University of Maine at Orono — as Stephen king once quipped, “that crossword-puzzle favorite”), Richard Linklater's 1st movie, *Slacker*, with the balding, middle-aged guy picked up from the funeral by the two youth in the car going, “Fuck it! Should have let him rot . . . thought he'd *never* die!” the wheels in his mind started turning.

The second movie?

Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle, of course.

And the rest, as they say, is history . . .

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But these transport boxes, damn, they were really somehin'! Crawl right outta one, and it was the same anywhere, to you.

It was called, “Starbucks.”

People'd crawl out of the goddamn things and act like they were on a new planet — *the same one*. Everything was “familiarized” by an internship in Starbucksosia (as some familiars called it, in-the-know types you couldn't get a straight answer out of without them chuckling at you, the types who'd be vying for the executive bathroom key if they hadn't plummeted in their ambition to a level-or-two above stock boy, given how gee-whiz nice the interior of their all-but-abodes *felt* like . . . *much* more ego-furnishing than *owning* your own Subway® sandwich shop franchise, even!), then you'd crawl out into your “of course” locale . . . Portland, OR . . . Ann Arbor, MI . . . Missoula, MT . . . with a smirk and a pout for anyone who dared *hint* at your being an untested, unaccredited cog in the wheel.

“What you even *bring* these for?” someone at an independent bookstore in one of the locales mentioned above exclaimed at the Starbucksian's offerings. They were being colonized.

From within.

But Roy was drifting in his thoughts.

“Morning, Mr. Parker,” a young woman, her hair still in curlers, said as she drove up to the window in her station wagon.

“Hi Nellie,” he signed, grinning, putting down that paperback for good — *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. (Even at $0.35 “red-tag” at a garage sale, it was a slow read.) “How's life treatin' ya?” He had to lean forward, like he was at Burger King — of course.

“Fine,” she piped up, a little *too* loudly, owing to her having to reach up to the window a little bit.” We got ma done finally, so now maybe we can take that vacation we've always wanted to.”

People have such small hopes, he reflected. “Atkins diet?”

“Yup. Killed her straightaway, barely took a season or two.”

“Not gonna *sue*, are ya?” he grinned. Of course he already knew the answer.

“Nah.” She waved her hand, like she was the funniest comedienne in the world, brimming with confidence, leaving the laughter to others. (The *absurdity* of it!) “Just tryin' to *help*, is all . . . ”

“Cause of death?” He took out his pen and clicked it. He knew the old woman's age — 72. Everybody had seen this one coming.

“Death by hot dog.”

Roy could relax. After filling out all the paperwork — in triplicate; it was a miracle what carbons did to save time — Roy gave her a receipt, a stamped document and a lollipop (“Uhh . . . gray— no . . . yes! GRAPE!”) she'd said, clapping her hands, as Boris, the undertaker, unloaded the stiff from the car using a one-handed, two-wheel trolley) and set her on her way . . . Oohp! Here's another one. A stately, grim, grey-and-black Cadillac . . . driving very slowly . . . very slooowly up the drive . . . creeping around the turn, and—

Oh boy, here we go, Roy thought, *we got a live one*.

Didn't look like a townee.

“Hi, young feller,” the old lady said. “Boy did my uncle take a long time to die!”

Roy sighed (hopefully, out of the range of the microphone). Always he had known his business had came from the vicissitudes of modern life . . . but he had never wanted to accelerate the indifference from which the need, the demand for his kind of place had sprung. Sometimes, you served the other side of the same coin, whether you wanted to or not — the wrong people took it the way they, all along, would've been all too pleased to. “How old was he?”

(Call it “collateral benefit” . . . Roy tried to focus, but he couldn't help it, he always got distracted when irked . . .)

“*114!*” She smiled, waiting for him to take this in.

Roy gulped. *Wow, this woman had waited a long time to be free!*

He filled out the paperwork *tout de suite*.

She waved away the right to a lollipop; she was probably going into town to get laid.

THE END