

Dr. Norm O. Pathy, M.D.

by George LaCas

One day, Phil Butz awoke from unsettling dreams: visions of wandering among the dust and fuzz and balled-up pubic hair that sticks under the lunatic fringe, alone and insane, in search of a magic formula. He sat up in bed and stared at his wife's broad backside where she slept next to him, facing the wall. At that moment the alarm went off — 6:30 AM. For a brief time he wondered: Which is the nightmare, and which the reality? But then, stumbling to the bathroom to empty his bladder, he pushed such thinking out of his mind. It was not normal.

He followed his morning routine almost to the letter. While his wife cooked oatmeal and turkey bacon and sliced two grapefruits in half, Butz read the paper at the kitchen table while he drank coffee. Gold prices were through the roof. Protests had moved into the universities. The new Republican president, Nikki Quam, was threatening once again to nuke Iran. Butz noted with interest that the Red Sox were headed for the World Series.

In his foggy state of mind following his dream, he had made his coffee too strong, and already he was ready to move his bowels. He got up from the breakfast table, mumbling something to his wife about “freshening up” before eating, and went into the bathroom again. He dropped his pajama bottoms, sat down on the toilet, and right away he experienced severe abdominal pains. He made no groans of pain, afraid his wife might hear. Determined to tough it out, Butz soon pushed a huge, sharp and excruciatingly painful B.M. out of himself. He slumped forward, drooling into his lap.

Finding a fair amount of blood on the toilet paper as he wiped, Butz feared the worst. With his heart beating in his throat, he stood up, used the handle of the toilet brush to move the soggy bloodstained paper aside, and peered down at the solid waste that had been so painful.

It was a turtle, about the size of a small bowl or ceramic soap dish. No wonder it hurt so damn much, he thought. After hesitating, he flushed it, and prepared to shove it down into the whirling water with the brush handle if needed. It disappeared, and the toilet flushed normally.

After a quick shower, he went in to finish his breakfast, though he'd lost his appetite.

He took the morning off from work (not telling his wife, of course) and went to the doctor. His friend Jack Spahl, his usual doctor, was still on vacation in Bermuda, so he saw Jack's partner, a new doctor from India named Pathy.

Dr. Pathy hummed happily while performing the physical, and did not seem to find anything wrong. He told Butz to get dressed so they could then "have a chat." After he dressed, Butz sat across from Dr. Pathy, while the doctor fiddled with a scale model of a human brain that also served as a paperweight on his desk.

"I am finding nothing wrong with you today, Mr. Butz," the doctor said.

"That's good to hear," Butz said. He wanted to tell the doctor about the turtle, but could not find the words.

"So let me ask you, then, about your normal routine," the doctor went on. "You are waking at what time?"

"Six-thirty."

"Perfectly normal," the doctor said. He probed the cerebellum, an area on the rear of the brain done in a cobalt blue. Butz wondered if the brain came apart, like some kind of puzzle. "And your usual diet?"

"Low fat, high fiber, moderate protein," Butz said. "My wife is a maniac about a healthy diet. She's a foodie, from L.A."

"I see," the doctor said. Suddenly Butz was sure that Dr. Pathy wasn't listening, just going through the motions. "And your political opinions — would you be having any extreme thoughts or desires along those lines?"

Butz frowned. "What? No, no, I'm not very political. I normally vote Democrat, though sometimes I choose a Republican candidate."

"Hmm. Normally," the doctor echoed, looking at the bottom of the model brain where the brainstem ended in a kind of stump (done in yellow). Dr. Pathy had a pencil-thin mustache, and Butz watched it twitch in doubt. "Now then, as to your sex life. How are you in this area?"

Butz looked at the ceiling. I just shit out a turtle, Doctor, he wanted to say, and you ask about my marital relations. But he didn't say it, instead: "Oh, once or twice a week with the wife, nothing special, nothing weird. No problems there."

Dr. Pathy placed the brain on his blotter, looked up at Butz, and smiled. "Very well then, Mr. Butz, I pronounce you healthy, normal, and ready to go back to work."

"Work?"

"You know, when you mentioned your wife, and food, I was thinking of a wonderful turtle soup my dear wife made for me, just last night," said the doctor.

Butz stood, leaned forward, and vomited his breakfast all over the doctor's desk. As he straightened back up, he saw the plaque on the desk, which he'd not noticed before: DR. NORM O. PATHY, M.D., it read.

