

The Rainbow Clockwerkz

by Hugh Barlow

These stupid migraines of mine have really made life confusing. I often find it difficult to focus on simple tasks, and even familiar places and people can be difficult to place when I am in the middle of one of these prolonged train wrecks that seem to dominate my life lately. This is why I just didn't go straight into panic mode when I found myself back at my original college working as the head maintenance man. The buildings were mostly familiar, but none of the faces I knew were there. I did not remember moving back to Nebraska, but everyone was treating me with the familiarity of someone they had come to rely on to solve their problems for them, "Oh, OK! Hugh is here, and I just KNOW that he can fix this! Move aside and give him room so he can see what the problem is." I just figured that the confusion I was experiencing would clear itself up given some time and a bit more information, and went about doing what I was good at—fixing things. Today's task wasn't really clear to me though. I was given a tool cart and I was expected to go through the service tunnels under campus with the cart, find the problem at the other end of the tunnel, and FIX it—which would have been impossible when I used to work in those tunnels as a student YEARS before. Nutcracker Junction alone would have prevented me from completing the task if the generally crowded conditions of the tunnels did not keep me from getting there first. Standing in the Boiler Room terminus, however, I noticed that there were two shiny black tracks scored into the concrete floor that were just about the same width as the wheels on the tool cart...evidence of YEARS of travel down the tunnel with the very cart I was pushing. I was curious about how they had solved the Nutcracker Junction problem, so I began to push the cart through the tunnel.

The Nutcracker Junction was aptly named by some anonymous person years before I ever experienced crossing the junction

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personally. It had grown in fame and was known by people on campus who had never even SEEN the service tunnels that criss-crossed the campus under their very feet. Most people only knew about the tunnels if they ever asked the question, "what is that steel plate in the sidewalk for?" The answer was usually, "That is an access door to the service tunnels under campus, and it leads to the Nutcracker Junction," There is an old saying that reminds me of those service tunnels, "All roads lead to Rome." In this case, all tunnels lead to the Nutcracker Junction. The service tunnels were not designed to provide an unobstructed weather-proof path for the college's service personnel to get from one end of campus to the other with ease and comfort. No, they were designed to get the flow of OTHER vital services from one end of campus to the other. Basically water, sewer, heat and air conditioning were all run through the service tunnels, and all those PIPES met at Nutcracker Junction. The Nutcracker Junction was a tangle of pipes and wires. It was a nightmare for large adult males to traverse because so much of the vital lifeblood of the campus flowed through that intersection that there was not a clear path to traverse. In order to get through that tangle, an adult male would have to straddle several large pipes while he ducked under several others and shimmied between several more. This always proved to be an uncomfortable experience for large men. Less so for diminutive men and also for women (for obvious reasons). It was always an uncomfortable experience for me.

The simplest solution seemed to be the one that was used. When I got to the junction, I discovered that all the pipes that had made the nightmare tangle were simply gone. I had not even noticed that the pipes in the tunnel I had traversed to get there were gone also. As I stood stooped in the intersection at Nutcracker Junction, I looked forward, backwards, right, and left and there was not a single pipe to be seen. Just dim Watted bulbs in steel reinforced safety fixtures mounted on the walls as far as I could see. Since it wasn't clear what my task was to be, or exactly where it was, I made a choice as to my destination based mostly on curiosity. Going forward would have

taken me to the utility room at the administrative building on campus. To my right, I would go to the basement of the women's dorm. The left leg lead to the old men's dorm and the cafeteria. I figured the most likely place for my type of trouble was at the cafeteria, and I wanted to visit for a short while with my old home. To the left I went. The trek seemed to take a bit longer than I remember, and when I finally emerged from my subterranean excursion, I found not the entrance to the cafeteria, but an office suite that was about two blocks OFF campus. The office staff was as confused as I was as to the purpose of my visit, so I excused myself and tried to retreat to the warrens from whence I emerged but found myself unable to open the door that would grant me ingress to the tunnels. With apologies, struggles, and a bit of help from the staff in the office suite, I managed to get my tool cart up to street level and out to the street. I was able to get my bearings by using the school's most prominent landmark, the campus clock-tower, to guide me back.

As I reached the edge of campus pushing my cart I noticed that the school's old gymnasium had been converted into a multi-bay garage. It seemed that there was an automotive class being taught there, and the bays were filled with students working on classic cars. My old '53 Plymouth was there, and because of a feeling of nostalgia, I entered and began to converse with the students working on my old car. As I spoke, a gorgeous young woman (who greatly resembled my wife in her youth) came and asked who I was. I gave her my name, told her that I worked for the school and that the car I was looking at used to belong to me. I began to point out all the little flaws and defects that made me sure it was my old car, and not simply one that looked like mine. All the students seemed to have heard of me, although none of us had met, and the gorgeous young woman disclosed that she was the instructor for the class. She took me for a tour of the classroom, showed me HER car (a hot pink '67 Mustang convertible with a modern 302 engine) and her new silver Triumph motorcycle. I was duly impressed, but stated

that I had to get back to work as the entire class clamoured that they wanted to join my car club. I did not realise that I had one, and I directed them instead to a club that I knew of locally with the instruction to simply let the president of the club know that I had sent them. This seemed to satisfy the masses, but as I began to leave I realised that I had lost my tool cart somewhere along the way. I searched the garage, but could not find it. Since my motorcycle was on campus, I decided that it would be faster for me to look for the cart with my bike than on foot, so I started up my 1980 Suzuki GS 1000 and began to cruise the neighbourhood looking for the cart.

I quickly got lost, since nothing in the old neighbourhood looked the way I remembered, and I stopped at the bottom of a hill to try to get my bearings near a little park I thought looked familiar. As I sat on my bike searching for something that looked as I remembered, I heard the roar of an exotic motorcycle come up behind me. The woman from the school garage had driven up from behind on her Triumph. She dismounted from the bike, took her helmet off, shook out her long blond hair and came to me. She climbed up on the gas tank of my bike and sat cross legged facing me in a very unladylike manner as I sat on the far back of the bike and balanced it for both of us. The woman grinned, giggled, and flirted with me as I tried to explain that I was lost and had lost my tool cart and that I needed to get back to work. She assured me that this was not a problem. She said that I was not as lost as I thought I was, that she would help me find my cart, and that all I had to do was follow her to her home nearby where I could do anything I wanted to her. As flattering as that offer was, I told her that I had to decline since I was a married man and had children that were nearly as old as she was. I explained that under different circumstances, I would have gladly taken her up on her offer, but that I did not really know her. I tried to decline her offer gracefully, but as soon as I did, I felt something hit the back of the black trench coat I was wearing hard enough to sting through the folds of the coat's fabric. After the first stinging blow, the shots came at me regularly on my right side toward the

middle of the back. Out of curiosity, I reached around my back to try to touch the spot and perhaps dislodge whatever seemed to be striking me with the slow cadence of a metronome. My hand came back toward my face feeling wet, and it felt like there was something crawling on it. I looked closely, and a greenish-yellow ichor was spread across the back of my hand and what looked like a bee without it's hind quarters was dragging it's intestines through the ichor. At closer inspection, what I first took to be a bee was not. It wasn't a wasp, and may have been a hornet, but I was unsure. The strikes were coming at regularly spaced intervals, and it seemed that someone was shooting at me with an air powered rifle using not-bees. The bore of the device must have been larger than a BB gun, so I mentally tagged it as a Not-Bee gun. The "Not Bee" on my hand seemed to have venom in it's glance and I wondered how I could tell that there was hatred in it's multifaceted ocular orbs when all I should have been able to see at best was a multifaceted reflection of myself. This introspection took place in the span of a few Not-Bee shots, and once I realized what was going on, I explained with great urgency to the woman who was trying to seduce me that there was someone shooting at me with venomous insects and that I thought it would be best for her to get on her bike and go HOME. It was obvious that the person sniping at me was targeting ME and not her, and I felt she would be safest away from me.

Once she got off my bike, I moved it out into the middle of the street so that the attempted seductress would not be in the line of fire as she got on her own bike. Once I heard her bike start off and drive away, and was sure that the sniper was still targeting me, I started my bike and drove off in the opposite direction. By this time, the coat was starting to get heavy with the fluids of the dead and dying insects, and I could feel the slime from the guts and poison start to infiltrate the fabric of my shirt. I wondered how the poison would affect me without it being injected directly into the skin as if by a sting, but by being absorbed instead. I felt it best to keep the

coat as protection until I was sure I was beyond reach of the sniper, but I did not want to lose the coat since I had had it for several decades. I had an emotional attachment to the coat, so I figured I would drop it off somewhere where I could find it later. I would then take it home once I got my bearings and wash it to get rid of the poison. I dropped the coat a few blocks after leaving the scene of the incident, leaving it behind a dumpster at an iconic restaurant in the area. Shortly afterward I began to feel woozy and I do not know how I found my way home.

I awoke sometime later to find myself freshly washed, naked and on a bed. My head was resting on something soft and flesh-toned, but I was having some difficulty in processing what it was that I was resting on. It was not a pillow. I did not have my bifocals on, so the impression I got in the short time my eyes had been opened was rather fuzzy, and I was having more difficulty than normal in gaining focus. After blinking a few times and squeezing my eyelids tightly against my eyeballs, I was able to get some sense of focus, but what I saw did not make sense. I saw flesh tones, sparse, light coloured curly hair, and what at first I took to be diamond glitter. More squeezing brought a temporary sharper focus, and the glitter resolved itself into crushed ice and broken glass from a clear light bulb. More squeezing of the eyeballs brought the flesh-toned area with sparse, light coloured hair into focus and I realised that I was looking at female genitalia. With a start, I jumped up to discover that I had been asleep with my head on my wife's bare thigh. Knowing that my wife never slept in the nude, I was confused. I was also confused as to why she would be asleep with both crushed ice and a broken light bulb between her legs. I woke her as calmly as I could and tried to tell her to get up carefully without closing her legs. I did not want her to injure herself as she woke in a panic. As usual, she failed to understand what it was that I wanted from her and jumped up in anger on the bed and began to yell at me for waking her up for no reason at all. I tried to explain to her that I woke to find her with ice and broken glass between her legs, and

that I had not placed either item there, but she ignored what I was saying and continued to berate me for waking her up for no reason. I simply gathered the bedclothes up and emptied the contents into the trash while she raged at me. I put the sheets into the washing machine and turned it on. I then went and got dressed.

As I went out to the garage to get my motorcycle and begin my search anew for the tool cart and to begin a fresh search for the trench coat, my wife began to complain about the hundreds of puppies that seemed to have taken refuge in our garage during the night. I tried to explain that I had no idea where they had come from, and I was puzzled as to why she was blaming me, but I told her that I would do something about them when I returned from looking for my lost items. I drove by the college to see if the seductress was there, because I was concerned for her safety, and once I saw her motorcycle parked in the school workshop, I left. That was a can of worms I did not feel like opening at that moment. I started to drive around the area looking for the restaurant where I had left the coat, but again got lost. I drove around town all day without recognise a single thing. Finally, as the sun began to set, I found myself somewhere that looked familiar. Unfortunately, the place that I found myself reminded me of an area surrounding an Ivy League University near where I grew up several thousand miles from Lincoln, Nebraska where I was supposed to be. The scene that I saw before me was of a street that went straight down into a gorge. The street crossed the bridge over the gorge, and then came up the hill on the other side. My vantage point seemed to be directly above the near end of the bridge, and the gently sloping hill to the bridge suddenly seemed much steeper than I remembered it being. Before I realised it, I was too far down the slope to stop and I was having a bout of light-headedness that gave the scene a surreal feeling of non-reality.

I felt light on the saddle of the motorcycle, and this translated to my mind as going down a very steep slope. I reasoned that if this

side looked deceptively similar to the other, I was going to have to accelerate abruptly and quite hard to gain the momentum I would need to make it up the other side. Otherwise, I would not have the needed momentum, and I would end up falling off the motorcycle about half way up the other bank and then sliding back down to the bridge at best. At worst, I would end up falling off the bridge and into the roiling waters of the gorge below. I accelerated with alacrity. I hit the bridge with quite a downward force, so I felt comfortable with the thought that my premise was correct in thinking that the slope was deceptively steeper than it looked. I hit the other side of the bridge at a speed that was more than certain to carry me up the other side if it was similarly deceptive. It was not. It was deceptive, but not in like manner. It was as STEEP as the other side seemed to be, and in that I had judged correctly. Unfortunately, the incline was not as LONG as the bank on the other side. I topped the hill at a much faster rate of speed and much sooner than I had planned on. As the bike levitated itself off the street below me, everything surrounding me took on an ethereal quality. It was as if everything suddenly went from existing in a solid state to one that was gaseous. The colours took on a vibrancy that was almost like neon. The motorcycle flipped over as I was flying through the air, and as I passed everything hanging upside down and backwards in what felt like a slow-motion drift, the thought quietly came to my head; "I am going to die. When I hit the ground with the motorcycle on top of me, I am going to break my neck." There was no panic in the thought. Shortly after the first thought of my impending doom, another came to mind, "This reminds me of a roller coaster ride named after the book 'A Clockwork Orange.'"

When I regain consciousness, I find myself in the new home of a family I have come to call, "The Blinkey Lights." I met the Blinkey Light family through my Saturday evening adventures at my local Dairy Queen. A couple, Daniel and Monica, that hangs out with the Blinkey Lights family on Saturday nights had stopped in to get a treat. They commented that they liked my '72 Chevy pickup truck.

Thereafter, every few weeks or so, I would see these two at the DQ. They started bringing other members of their car club around, and I eventually met the Blinkey Light family, the father of whom was also the president of the car club that they belonged to. The car club was named "Lethal Injection," and many of the cars in the club were "rice burners." For those who do not understand the automotive enthusiast culture, a "rice burner" is an Asian car or motorcycle or an AMERICAN car that uses an Asian drive-line. German cars are frequently referred to as "Kraut Burners," and there are other monikers for the various makes of European cars and bikes. American built cars and motorcycles are simply referred to as "American Iron" although there are few true American cars being built any more. Most of the American Iron on the road today was built before the 1990's. Many in the Lethal Injection Car Club drive these customised Rice Burners with American badges and neon lights. A few have Japanese or Korean cars and one drives a late model Cadillac SUV with a monster stereo system. Many in the club consider themselves to be "Juggaloos." Juggaloos are fans of a "Music Group" called The Insane Clown Posse. They have a philosophy that seems to embrace poverty and violence. I started to hang out with the group in an effort to help these poor souls who seem to be well meaning people who are somewhat misguided and have adopted the Juggaloo philosophy in an attempt to make a virtue of necessity. These folks are handed lemons and are trying to make lemonade. They seem to use Juggaloo philosophy as a substitute for religion. I stand and watch the group as a whole make verbal and occasionally physical jabs at one another and try to damp down their wilder impulses. I have been asked by some why I hang out with the group, and I tell them that it is like watching a slow moving train wreck. You can see it coming and can get out of the way, but you cannot stop it. It is fascinating to watch, and can even be fun if no-one gets hurt. I try to see to it that no-one gets hurt.

The Blinkey Lights family consists of Papa Blinkey Lights, Mama Blinkey Lights, 3 beautiful little girls, and a handsome young boy. I

pray for this family every night. Mama and Papa both work part time, with Papa on a downward spiral for hours. The family requires assistance from social services to make ends meet, and Papa takes odd jobs repairing cars for people to make money to pay the light bill. Where they get the money to put the blinkey neon lights on their customised cars puzzles me somewhat. I think the money could be better used elsewhere. Having set the stage for our relationship, I will now get back to where I found myself upon once again becoming conscious.

The Blikey Lights' family home that I was familiar with was near my home town. They lived in a small house trailer with an attached workshop/garage in a bedroom community near the town where I lived. The "NEW" Blinkey Lights family homestead that I found myself in was nowhere near Deep South Texas, but was instead in the "Antebellum South" of Rural Georgia or Tennessee. This strikes me as odd at the time, since I know the family roots are instead in Kentucky or Arkansas. The "New" family home is a relative term, since the structure I find myself in is in no way new. It is a ramshackle building built on a terraced hillside in the middle of the woods, and looks like it may have been built at the first stages of settlement in the area. The walls are made of what looks like hand sawed planks as is the floor and ceiling. The open areas are braced with hand hewn poles that support the tin roof. Each room is it's own level, and to go from room to room in the house requires a few steps up or down. The family seems to be celebrating some sort of occasion, although I do not know if it is a holiday, or someone's birthday. Many people from the car club seem to cycle in and out of the kitchen/ living-room/dining area that I find myself in, but there are a number of strangers as well. Papa is dressed in his best Insane Clown Posse clown suit with the checker-board pattern clothing and insane clown make-up. This ensemble is topped off with the traditional "Fool's Cap," The eldest daughter, who is 10 years old, sits on my lap as I sit at the bar in the dining room. She keeps rubbing my hands with her fingers as if she is trying to figure out what I have in my hands. I

bring them up above the counter top to show her that they are empty, when to my surprise, I find them pierced with what looks like huge stainless steel fish hooks. I quickly realise that they are NOT fish hooks though because there are no BARBS or eyelets on any of the steel hooks that pierce my hands and cause them to remain knotted upon themselves. I tease one of the steel shafts out of my hands using my thumb and finger on the other hand and I am surprised to find that there is no blood on the steel and that the hole in my flesh seals itself without a trace as the shaft is removed. There is absolutely no pain involved as I remove the steel from my hands one shaft at a time, and I find the task helped by the odd flexibility of the stainless steel as it is removed. Eldest Daughter Blinkey Lights begins to play with the steel shafts as they are laid out on the table in front of her, but I try to explain that I do not think it is a good idea for her to do this. I am frustrated in communicating with the girl because she is deaf, and she does not seem to be able to read my lips as I am telling her to leave the hooks alone. I yell for Mama Blinkey Lights to translate using sign language only to discover that while my attention was diverted in getting Mama's attention, the steel shafts have multiplied and have moved farther up my arm. Mama Blinkey Lights then gets involved in helping me to remove the steel, and just as we are about to finish the task, Mama and I get distracted by Papa Blinkey Lights antics. Mama Blinkey Lights yells at Papa Blinkey Lights and tells him to quit playing the fool, and when we turn our attention back to removing the shafts, we are chagrined to find that not only have they multiplied once again, but that they have gone yet farther up my arms and have changed from stainless steel to something that looks like a tube of neon light with blobs of Lava Lamp wax bubbling through them. The new shafts come in all the colours of the rainbow. At this point I lose consciousness again.

When I come to again, I am back in my home town in Deep South Texas. I am standing near a high school on the north side of town directing middle school kids (not high schoolers) away from the

school in the middle of the night. I am concerned for the safety of these anonymous children and while I am performing the task of a crossing guard, it does not feel like it is my regular job. I have this feeling of urgency about the task, but I cannot understand what is causing the feeling. There are no obvious signs of danger such as a fire. All I know is that I must get all the kids away from the school and safely across the street. This is difficult to do because the street is filled with traffic, and many of the drivers I have to try to stop seem to be drunk. Those that are NOT drunk often seem to be irritated at having to stop for children at a school cross-walk in the middle of the night. Across the street from the school is what looks like an old row of tenement buildings from the mid-1800's in New York City. I find it odd that such a neighbourhood would be built in a newly developed residential center in my home town in Deep South Texas. The buildings are each 2 to 3 stories tall and made of clap-board lumber; another oddity. The buildings seem to lean precariously on each other, and there is an alley behind each building that runs the full length of the block that these homes are built on. Each small back yard is surrounded by a rickety picket fence that seems designed not so much to keep people out, but instead to merely mark the boundaries of each property. Behind the first house on the street directly across from the school, I am surprised to find my aunt's old dog named Bear. Bear greets me gleefully but I struggle to understand how I can so readily recognise him since he is covered from behind the ears on the back of his head to the tip of his tail in what looks like melted candle wax. My aunt comes out the back door of the tenement house to see what has gotten Bear so excited. She then recognises me. She asks me what I am doing, and I explain my need to get the kids safely away from the school. She agrees to help, but requires me to do a favour for her first. She promises to get all the kids safely into the alley behind the tenement row if I remove the wax that Bear is encased in. This task proves to be quite difficult and disgusting since Bear has been trapped in the wax for several days. Trapped in the wax with him is all the feces and urine he has expelled since becoming encased. By

the time I get to him, the shell of wax looks like a turtle shell, and Bear is floating about inside this shell in a mixture that has the consistency of the flavored water that I used to get in little wax bottles as a treat when I was a child. I attack the task with urgency, since I still feel that I need to be there to assist my aunt with the school children. The look on Bear's face when he is finally freed from his wax prison is precious. The smell is atrocious.

I awake to find that it is once again time to take my pain pills. Having just come out of surgery, the narcotics I am taking are quite strong. Now I know where the book "Alice in Wonderland" came from. I have been told that many people who use illicit drugs do so to get experiences just like this. I cannot for the life of me understand WHY anyone would do this to themselves on PURPOSE.

