

Dead Bear

by Johnny Walker

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After CJ had returned from his trip to New Hampshire, he was faced with figuring out just how this Hayson thing worked. This strange new device had him mesmerized and he had questions burning in the back of his mind. The brief encounter in the forest left him clueless and since there were no instructions attached, and no trainer to show him the ropes, he knew he had to delve into the cylinder and learn for himself. But first he had to find a large space, an open area where he could release the bear from the Hayson.

He made a few calls and told some club owners he needed to update some equipment in their club. These owners never doubted CJ's late-night routine; he could easily pull an all-nighter with no questions asked.

He ended up taking the Hayson into a club called Sublines, a larger than normal venue in the heart of Times Square. Sublines seemed to be busy no matter who was performing. The venue was more of an entertainment factory than a nightclub, and even though the owner of Sublines was a terrific person, the appearance of the club lacked ambition. On top of that, no money had ever been spent to update the sound-gear and no one seemed to care about the thirty-year-old, lighting system. He'd spent many nights in Sublines repairing decrepit gear, by swapping out parts from broken down equipment that had been lying around in storage. If there were an accident, where technical gear became damaged, no one at Sublines would have a clue.

Sublines was built as a large, open-aired club; providing uncluttered views of the stage from anywhere in the city-block, sized arena by any one of the sixteen hundred patrons that it held. And even better, it was below street level; tucked away under a forty-story skyscraper. There was no way a passer-by could see inside of

Sublines, making it the perfect place to experiment with the unknown.

Being one of the oldest venues in Manhattan, Sublines had also been built on top of an ancient, Indian burial ground, which left the club alive with spirits at night—to say the least. In addition to the semblance activity, the venue rumbled during the wee-hours from the different subway lines that surrounded the club. Behind the massive north wall of the venue, the 2 and 3 trains never seemed to stop, while the N, and R, trains had their tracks running along the south structure of the club. Two floors lower, under the east section of the showroom, the D train shuffled New Yorkers to-and-fro all night long.

He arrived at Sublines toward the end of a show one night, gear in hand, ready to take on the paranormal curve ball. After the staff had left the club, he locked the doors and turned on every last light, making the showroom as bright as possible.

In anticipation of facing the bear, he brought a heavy-duty, orange extension-cord with him. He pulled the cord out of his bag and snipped the female end off the cord; then he removed about eight feet of outer wrapping so he could separate the two main-wires inside the cord. Next, he removed about eight inches of insulation from the end of each line, leaving the copper wires inside completely bare and exposed.

Using dinner forks, he made handles at the end of each wire by weaving the copper threads through the grooves in the fork and then coiling the excess wire around the handle of the stemware. He then wrapped foam and duct tape around the handles so he could hold the forks without being electrocuted.

He isolated one wall socket from the rest of the system, so if there were a power surge, it would only fry that circuit breaker and he wouldn't be left in the dark with a wild animal.

This seemed to be the best way to defend himself against the bear; he could test the cylinder a few times while keeping the animal under control. After learning how the device worked, he would get the bear back into the Hayson. The perfect plan.

Feeling somewhat apprehensive, he took five minutes to grab a stiff shot of Wild Turkey from the bar.

CJ placed the hand-wired forks on separate tables and plugged the orange cord into the wall socket. With his hands shaking and his heart racing, he aimed the cylinder at the floor and pressed down on the side-switch. A fury of blue lights flew out of the Hayson, but no bear appeared.

After realizing he'd grabbed the wrong cylinder; he grabbed a different one, stood beside the live wires, and slammed down on the side-switch. The Hayson made a sharp, crackling sound this time, as though he were opening a bag of freeze-dried coffee—times twenty. When the blue lights soared out of the cylinder, he took a few steps back and waited.

As the unearthly lights began to take shape on the floor, the brown bear slowly materialized in front of him, looking exactly as it did when he last saw it in the riverbed; unconscious and surrounded by a web of blue lights. As the lights began to fade, though, the beast began to come around.

Within a few beats, the bear had come to. It shook its head a few times and let out an angry growl before rising and standing a good nine-feet tall. The tables and chairs in the club suddenly looked like little toys. CJ became paralyzed and broke out in a sweat when he realized what he was up against. The forks became slippery in his hands.

With its nose curled back and its mouth wide open, the bear growled and swung at CJ with one of its massive paws. CJ dodged the strike and the paw smashed into a table instead, sending the table soaring through the air and landing as a pile of toothpicks.

CJ fell flat on his back, but he managed to hold on to the forks, keeping them high in the air above his head. The bear exposed his fangs and made another powerful lunge. CJ tried to stick the forks into its neck but he only grazed the creature, giving it a good shock. The animal went into a brief spasm and fell on its chin. It rose

quickly though, shaking its head and trying to gain some balance on its spread out paws.

CJ realized a bit too late; he'd bitten off more than he could chew. He needed to get the animal back inside of the Hayson—and fast, but he panicked just then because the live-wired forks had to be set down and the Hayson had to be picked up. The bear had already stood, though, and it was staring him down.

As if in slow motion, the giant bear lowered its legs and sprung toward CJ with one big leap, but its paw snagged a cocktail table and sent the piece of furniture slamming into CJ, knocking him down and pinning him to the floor. The bear roared and came at CJ, crushing chairs and clawing tabletops as it stumbled over the furniture. In two-seconds flat the beast was on top of CJ... lowering its head to take a bite.

Without wasting a beat, CJ lunged the forks into the bear, with one fork going straight into its ear, piercing the soft gristle and giving CJ a solid hit.

The creature flew backwards as though someone had yanked it away. It began shaking violently while lights flickered throughout the club. The huge beast started rolling around on the floor, smashing even more tables and chairs into pieces. CJ stepped away from the bear and watched what resembled a small tornado in action, while dodging furniture as it flew through the air.

Eventually, the huge bear stopped flopping around and lay motionless on the floor, tangled in orange cord and broken furniture.

CJ started pacing the floor in hyper-speed, trying to shake off his emotions; he was sad, scared, and out of breath. The nerves in his neck began twitching at a steady pace. After a few minutes, he sat with his hands on his knees, hanging his head low and hating himself for what he had just done. This wasn't tough; this was wrong. Tears swelled in his eyes and he suddenly felt like a lowlife.

Would it have killed him back in New Hampshire? Should he have not hiked through the forest as he's done all his life? Should he have waited...to witness the interaction between the bear and the ghost? Should he have left the Hayson behind? He wanted an excuse so bad

he thought about making one up, just to get through this—to get rid of his guilt, but nothing worked. He was seriously upset and this was no-one's fault but his own. He couldn't believe that one simple hike in the forest would leave him in a situation like this.

He sat beside the animal for about thirty minutes; contemplating calling for help, but there was just no way to explain what had happened. He sat thinking...wondering what to do with a dead bear in the middle of New York City. Within a few minutes, he had a plan.

Sublines produced a wide variety of shows and occasionally the performance space had to be rearranged. There were platforms and stage wedges on hand to accommodate the different acts, and Sublines had all the equipment needed to move the heavy sections around. He connected a hoist to a ceiling beam in the showroom and got the piano dolly from the storage room.

He unplugged the orange cord and tied it around the bear's legs and body; doubling and tripling the cord in some areas so he could lift the giant mammal with the hoist. While he was wrapping the cord around its legs, he became overwhelmed by the rank stench of the bear's fur. Mud, dung, the different tastes and smells of the forest seeped into his lungs. The disgusting odor made it hard to breathe.

After cranking and hoisting the heavy creature onto the piano truck, he cleared a path through the club and rolled the beast out of the showroom. When he got to the back door of the club, he remembered something. There were cameras in the hallways.

“Dammit.”

CJ knew the security guard that worked the graveyard shift; he watched over the building five nights a week. His name was Anderson. CJ had run across him many times while working late night at Sublines. He had to somehow divert Anderson from watching the video monitors in the security office, and he had to disguise himself for the camera in the loading dock.

CJ went to the green room; where artists either left clothes behind or stored the garb to wear every week for the reoccurring

shows. In searching through the lockers, he found some t-shirts and pants and a couple of jackets, along with few dresses, robes, and an assortment of wigs. While he was going through the lockers, he also found some waist-high, black dominatrix boots next to a leather whip.

“Had to be Lisa Lampanelli.” He tossed the get-up back into a locker.

He gathered up some clothes and tossed them in a box along with some empty beer bottles he'd pulled from the trash; then he placed everything next to the dead bear at the back door of the showroom. After he had mapped out his plan, he called the security office.

“Hey, Anderson, it's CJ...down in Sublines. How are ya'?”

“Hey, CJ. Who was down there tonight...anyone good?”

“Eh, same Ol', same Ol'... Hey listen; some rowdy people have been beating on the front doors. You know...the glass ones...upstairs? I can hear it all the way down in the showroom, but every time I go up there—no one is around. I'm trying to finish these repairs, and ...well, do you think you could check it out? It seems to be happening every ten minutes or so.” CJ waited for a confirmation on his story. “Any chance you could look into it?”

“Probably some drunk tourists, CJ, but I ain't doin' nuttin'. I'll check it out.”

He knew Anderson would take at least ten minutes to get downstairs before haphazardly walking the outer perimeter of the building, which would take another ten-to-fifteen minutes. After that, Anderson would stop by an office somewhere in the skyscraper and grab a treat from one of those 'honor-system' snack boxes...taking another few minutes before he would finally make it back to the security office. CJ safely had half-an-hour to get everything done.

Sublines had another exit downstairs, on the other side of the arena-sized showroom—caddy-corner to the back door. The side-exit led to a hallway that zigzagged through the basement and then ran behind the stage-wall of the club, with the main office of Sublines' being halfway down the same path. After passing the executive office, the corridor continued around a few more curves and

eventually led to the back door of Sublines, where the dead bear lay on the other side; just five feet away from the freight elevator.

He knew the camera at the side-door only captured a close-up of the door, so he stuck a black t-shirt into the back rim of his pants before he opened the door. If and when seen, that camera would show the front side of CJ coming out of Sublines, heading toward the executive office with zilch in his hands; nothing unusual at all.

He went down the hallway and into Sublines' main office. There he grabbed a broom and headed for the next camera, farther down the hall. That camera captured a panoramic view of the freight elevator and the backdoors to several businesses—one of them being Sublines. He approached the wide-shot camera from behind and underneath, using the broom handle to place the black t-shirt over the camera lens, leaning the broom against the wall afterwards. Now he could open the back door to Sublines without the camera capturing his image, but he only had about twenty-five minutes to pull this off.

He threw on a pair of baggy pants followed by a thick, down jacket and a scraggly wig, which he placed on his head backwards to cover his face. Then he placed another wig on top of the first one, as a wig should be worn. The final touch was the oversized robe he slipped on over everything. Now the camera at the loading dock would capture what looked like a sloppy, heavy woman with disheveled hair.

Rolling the heavy animal into the elevator was tougher than he thought and it took him at least ten minutes, but luckily Sublines was only two stories underneath ground level. It would only take about half-a-second to go up two floors.

When the elevator doors opened at the dock, he stepped out and started flinging empty beer bottles at the lights in the ceiling until he'd busted all the bulbs—with the exception of the upper, right corner; saving himself a faint amount of light, just enough to see the edge of the dock. If the loading dock camera recorded anything, it would be a heavy woman tossing beer bottles at the lights.

He rolled the bear out of the elevator and untied its legs. After pushing and prying with everything he had, the bear finally slid off the dolly and rolled over the edge of the dock. He got back in the elevator with the extension cord, the empty box, and the piano dolly.

As the silver elevator doors closed on the shadowed view of a dead bears paw, he knew that this night, and that image...would haunt him forever.

While traveling between the different floors, he stripped off the clothing and placed everything in the box with the extension cord; then he put the dolly and the box of clothes just inside the back door of Sublines. He knew the freight elevator, like many elevators, had a built-in memory that would trace its last ten stops, so he pressed several buttons to send it on a sporadic journey. By the time the elevator eventually stopped on the thirty-ninth floor, Sublines would be erased from its memory.

If his time guestimations were correct, he'd have just three minutes to get back inside the club.

He grabbed the broom from against the wall and removed the t-shirt he'd placed on the camera lens. Then he returned the broom to the executive office, stuffed the t-shirt into the front of his pants, and went to the side-exit. The side-door camera would now capture him going back into Sublines like any other day, and once again; with nothing in his hands.

Once back inside the club, he placed the costume and the extension cord in a large trash bag. He swept the showroom floor and put the loose fur and chunks of mud in the bag with the clothing. Then he went high into the ceiling and hid the trash bag on top of a gigantic, air duct.

While he was high on the ladder, he heard somebody call out his name. CJ came out of his skin; he wasn't expecting a visitor. He peeked over the air duct and saw Anderson walking through the lobby door and into the showroom. He forgot that Anderson had keys to anything and everything in the building.

“Dammit!”

He flew down the ladder and ran across the club so he could stop Anderson from coming too far into the showroom. Out of breath and nervous as hell, he approached Anderson.

"Did you run 'em off?" CJ asked, referring to the people that had never been there.

"Din't see nobody. I bet they came late for a show, got pissed, and banged on the door." Anderson took a bite from a candy bar. "Smells like shit in here, CJ. Pipes backed up?"

"I think so, it's been this way since early this evening. Listen..." CJ started nudging him out the door. "I appreciate you looking into the banging. You never know when somebody might break a door down, ya' know?"

"Oh, I've seen it all working late night, CJ. Nuttin'...and I mean *nuttin'*, could shock me at this point."

CJ had a visual of the dead bears paw. "Yeah. Well...thanks again."

Anderson got to the lobby door when he suddenly stopped and turned around. "Hey, I ain't busy if youz' wants me to look at dat plumbin'."

"No, that's ok. I think someone's taking care of it tomorrow; besides, you don't want to get all nasty n' shit."

"I said, I'd look—not *do*." Anderson turned and left the showroom. CJ stood patient, waiting for the clicking sound of the door being locked before he got back to work.

CJ went back up the ladder and tied the big trash bag to a beam in the ceiling...high above the air-duct. Given the cleaning habits of Sublines, the bag would remain hidden for twenty years.

In putting the venue back together, he took the broken tables and chairs and placed them under a small, lighting grid that hung in a different section of the showroom. He went into the ceiling and loosened the bolts on that metal frame, so it would fall down to the floor. Then he placed the broken furniture under and around the fallen, lighting truss, so it would appear as though the grid had come loose from the ceiling and smashed all the tables below it.

To finish the swap, he took the undamaged tables and set them up where the bear had destroyed so much furniture.

CJ would definitely get a call about the broken framework on the floor, but that would be the lesser' of all evils here. He would humbly come in at some point and do some repairs.

Finally, he grabbed a can of spray paint and went up into the ceiling again. He painted one section of pipes and placed some tags on several wires, giving the impression that some repairs had been done in that area. He painted the trash bag that was tied to the beam and just as a safety measure; he sprayed even more paint in other places to rid the club of the bears' pungent smell.

CJ called Anderson again.

"Hey...it's, CJ. I looked into the bad smell; it was a backed-up toilet. Just wanted to let you know I plunged it and flushed it down. It's all taken care of, but thanks for offering some help."

"Dat...was a toilet? Are you kiddin' me? I hope it wadn't nuttin' they serve down there...you know what I'm sayin'?"

"Hey, it is Times Square."

Anderson smacked out a few more words. "How late you gonna' work, CJ? It's 5:00 A.M."

"Holy shit! I've been working in the ceiling all night; time really flew by." There was no response from Anderson. "Come down and see a show, right?"

"If these bastards ever give me a night off."

"G'nite, Anderson."

Done. Everything was back to normal, except for some broken tables and the slight issue of a dead bear on the loading dock. All he could do was pray that no one would connect him to the animal. Only time would tell on that one.

Most likely, the dead bear would be such a mind-fuck for the building crew that they'd probably just remove it quietly. There could be fines and reports and loads of paperwork involved...news would spread and inspections would follow. Yep, they would probably sweep this incident right under the rug and Anderson would never say he's seen it all—ever again.

The bear was his first real lesson with the Hayson and that was several years before the tour with Dustins Dance. Even though he'd used the Hayson many times since then, the bear taught him that he couldn't just do anything he wanted. He had limits. He had to remember those limits and the ghost in New Orleans had just shown him; that being over-confident could cause him some major harm. He needed to stay alert right now and not forget his mistakes from the past.

