Surveil

by Matt Rowan

“I want you to know that you are being watched,” Ernie said. “I have trained a camera on your work station.”

“Oh!” said Nadine. She felt violated and also a bit hungry. She felt a nondescript emotion, too, but she knew she'd felt the same nondescript emotion before Ernie's disclosure, and her emotionality probably had nothing to do with anything, except for maybe her mother and hunger.

Speaking of having nothing to do with anything, if people ever had said Nadine was fat, they quickly added that she was not very fat and maybe just a little thicker than some. They were very polite people who didn't want to hurt feelings, hers or anyone's. Ernie didn't care who was hurt, if it got results. Ernie didn't care about the results he got, as long as that's what they were, results.

“So do something illegal. That way I can come back and arrest you, ok?”

“I can't think of anything illegal,” said Nadine.

Ernie walked about ten feet from Nadine. His back was turned to her, but he remained in view. He watched a large monitor. On the screen was Nadine, sitting at her desk.

“Ok, so you're being watched!” Ernie shouted, back still facing her while he shouted.

He watched the screen. Nadine picked her nose right out there in the open, gratuitously, but she did nothing that he could classify illegal.

“I said you're being surveilled! Do that illegal thing.”

“What one?” Nadine asked, continuing to really pick her nose. Her hand disappeared, but by the way her body shifted from side to side it was clear she was struggling to undo a wedgie.

“The one I'm gonna fire you for.”

“How? You're not a boss. You're not even a boss!”

“Just do it,” Ernie waved his arm frantic-like behind him, keeping his eyes on the monitor.

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“I've got a camera trained on you, too, because even the watcher can be the watched,” Nadine revealed, turning to her own monitor, on which was the startled visage of Ernie. Ernie who had his whole life hated when tables were turned or when tables were made even, or would that be leveled? When the playing field was leveled, though, not tables. It was hard to figure how leveling tables would express a different, bigger meaning. He scratched his head near to symbolism at the impenetrability of that thought, but mainly he scratched his head because it was itchy.

“I don't have time for tables to be leveled, I mean turned,” he told Nadine. “I'm a busy man who likes to watch and not be watched. You don't need to keep me in check.” Ernie had read it all in a book, you watch and you wait for someone to do something that is out of line. But how do you make sure that they're doing something out of line (and continue your own personal illegal activities) if that person is now watching you, spying on you and discovering that you are up to something very illegal?

“You have got some illegal paraphernalia, Ernie. I can see it all over your face, there is illegal stuff in your hands.” Nadine had adopted the rigid, authoritarian manner of someone dressed as an officer in the Gestapo, complete with an almost exaggeratedly spot-on eye patch that she would have worn had she had it.

This change in Nadine was so rapid Ernie's head literally spun, not like he was a cartoon, but spun as far as humanly possible. So it wasn't a spin but oscillation. It oscillated very hard and swiftly, then, and in doing so, his neck cracked loudly. The neck crack wasn't painful, more of a release than painful. He hadn't cracked his neck in quite some time, and neither had he been to his chiropractor in quite some time. He had been sleeping with his chiropractor's wife, which was part of the reason he'd avoided seeing his chiropractor. This was despite the birthday card he received from his chiropractor's office, as he did every year without fail, wishing him many happy returns and good spinal alignment in the coming year. But now everything he was up to, each tawdry detail, could all be

quashed by the simple fact that he was being watched by Nadine and who knew who else?

“But I'm the watchman!”

“So am I,” Nadine cried, “I'm a watchman, too.”

“Take him away,” Nadine ordered of the two men standing in the shadows. Ernie hadn't seen them because of where they had stood. And they took Ernie away. Took him into their shadows.

Nadine returned to really, really picking her nose.

What a disgusting thing.