

The Death of Childhood Heroes (or "Roadkill")

by Sam Ferree

We were pushing ninety down the highway through a stretch of what rightfully should have been called the Badlands. We were both absorbed and coping with the rapidly escalating stages of desperation and so neither of us noticed when the yellow figure stepped across the road. Neither of us noticed until the grotesque yet satisfying splat followed by two beats from the car's tires and suddenly going from ninety to zero, trailed by a streak of black rubber and red and yellow road kill.

"I think I just ran over Pikachu," I said, wondering when the shock would set in, but feeling this giddy urge to laugh.

Dorothy looked up from an article about how the nation was going to hell, or probably something close. She looked over her shoulder and stared at the thing lying in the road.

"That's not Pikachu," she said with her eerie calm voice she only used to fake serenity. "That's Big Bird."

"It can't be. It's too small," I insisted. The car was making strange sounds of displeasure so I put it in neutral and silenced the oldies station.

"Well," she said and carefully folded up the newspaper without looking. "It could be a miniature."

"But that would defeat the purpose of calling him Big Bird. He's supposed to be gargantuan." I wondered if we would be late for the wedding. Bob and Claire would be married in two hours and we

were three hours out - me with the ring in my pocket, but they didn't know that. Then, looking back at the dead, golden childhood playmate on the asphalt, I figured what's one more hour?

"Well," Dorothy said. She stopped, rubbed her temples and started to root through her purse. She gingerly pushed aside folded origami disaster articles and withdrew a prescription bottle. She took one pill, swallowed it dry and looked back at her Big Bird and there might have been concern in her eyes or maybe just nausea.

"Do you know first aid?" she asked me.

"Not for Pikachus. Or Big Birds, no matter what size."

We looked at each other, then at our watches. Yes, we would be late.

We walked across the desert highway and I could imagine that the Marlboro Man hacked up a piece of his lung right where we were standing. Feeling a wave of morbidity, we walked on either side of the yellow trail back to the corpse. We were silent for a moment, and I think we were both on the verge of crying seeing the poor creature messily split in half across what must have been the road that Hunter S. Thompson claimed was "bat country."

I threw up on the side of the road. When I stood up, Dorothy said, "Yup. Definitely Big Bird."

"Maybe... we could sew him back together?"

"And stuff him?" She asked and rubbed her temples again. She looked at me like she was about to say something, but decided prescription medication was the better option. "He's smiling," she said after downing the second green pill. "I think. It's appropriate - you know. Big Bird should die happy."

I nodded for lack of anything else to do. I said, "Hey - why did the Pikachu cross the road?"

"You're not funny." She coughed and adjusted the white bridesmaid dress that made her look so much more voluptuous. I thought about complementing her and decided to do so, but then she said, "You killed my childhood you fuck shit."

"I didn't mean to! It was his fault - you don't just step out in front of a car in... It's the middle of the fucking desert!" I looked up and down the road and all I could see were mirages. Then it dawned on me. "He committed suicide," I said solemnly.

She laughed. And laughed and then she looked at me and straightened my rented tux and slapped me across the face then kissed me hard on the mouth and then slapped me again. I feel this is an accurate representation of our relationship.

"You killed my childhood," she said. And so we stood there and we made up prayers and headlines for tomorrow's newspaper about how childhood was dead and we had sure as hell better start making things up or we're all doomed.

I carefully picked up the dead thunder-mouse/bird and carried it to the car, placing it like an old friend (which he was) in my back seat. "Pikachu was my favorite. He was always so loyal to Ash." I closed the door. "My dog used to bite my ankle as a child."

"I know." She said and touched my cheek with her white-now-bloody glove. "I've seen the teeth marks. We'd better hurry or we'll be late."

So we drove to the wedding and both of us broke the rules. We were supposed to wait for the priest to say "Speak now or forever hold your peace," and then rip into our well-rehearsed speeches about unrequited love and those nights harassing the McDonald's drive-

through workers or the times we couldn't remember because we were so heavily prescribed we just filled in the gaps with sex and jokes.

It didn't work out that way. We stormed through the church doors to see a handful of unfriendly college-friend faces glaring at our tardiness and one bored looking Elvis. We marched up to the altar - Dorothy took Bob and I took Claire and we professed our love with groping and kissing the soon-to-be-newly-weds before being thrown out by all our friends.

Later that night we buried the lightning mouse/bird in the desert where we killed him.

"The world's ending," Dorothy told me, dirty and sweating next to the shallow grave for our childhood heroes. "And you're all I have left."

I thought about saying something to the effect of "You're not alone," and realized I was probably wrong. So I smiled and asked her, "Who's next?"

