Bug Water

by Steven Gowin

Milton Berle bought a hot dog at the I-80 Stuckey's near Booneville, Iowa. True. I wasn't there, but I believe it.

Summers during high school, I worked at that Stuckey's. Sixteen miles West of Des Moines, I pumped gas and sold pecan nut rolls although I never ate that candy. Pecans very much resemble dead windshield bugs if you ask me.

I was ringing up junk from the candy shop, one day - those dunking birds and keychains printed with children's names like Jimmy, Claire, and Bobo. The bell over the front door rang loudly, and the guy looking after the gas island, Craig Shambaugh, rushed into the store.

Craig was always losing his belt, so his uniform pants, too big for him anyway, sagged below his underwear band. That's why he was constantly jerking those trousers up by their now broken belt loops. He pulled them up again that day while he caught his breath.

A pork fed Iowa kid, Craig had never told a lie in his life. Nevertheless, he insisted that Doris Day was out there, Doris Day in that blue 69 Impala. See it out there? She's in it. She hadn't said much, but sure thing, she's the one in all those movies. Doris Day. Go on out.

Anything could happen. I-80 runs East to West cross country, Manhattan to San Francisco. If I wanted, I could see her through an insect splattered windshield. I could squee gee away those insects with bug water already slimy from the day's I-80 bug massacres.

Still, I said no. I didn't care enough to walk out 20 yards to have a look. I did tell Craig if he got a chance, ask if she knows Uncle Miltie. And see if she was with that son who Charlie Manson almost killed. Or the Rock. They were pals in real life, I heard.

I sold a lot of dunking birds, and key chains, and other junk that afternoon. Oh, and I sent her out a pecan roll with Craig. These days I'm pretty sure it really was she.

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But I wasn't broken hearted. Because really, it was only Doris Day, and like she says, Que sera sera.