

A Day In The Life
By Chris Zell

'Woke up, fell out of bed, got a Band-Aid for my head. . .'

Well, that wasn't how it actually happened, but didn't you always want to know what prompted him to comb his hair instead of tending to the cut?

'Bloody damn,' John/Paul (I can never remember who wrote what song) said. 'I fell out of bed and split my head open. But, you know, my hair's a mess. Better comb it before dog in a bag (Yoko)/dog with wings (Linda) wakes up.' Yeah, sure.

When I wake up its just a little different.

'Ahhhhhhhhrrrggh.' Oh, wait, that's not me, it's the birds. Actually, my back hurts, my knees haven't heard the alarm yet and I have drool on my cheek. It's times like this that I wonder how morning sex ever got off the ground.

'Oh, baby, let me lick the drool off your face.' Not a pretty sight.

I turn my head and try to watch the television. Turning the television on is the first thing I do when I come home. It's a habit that I got into when I lived in hotels. No, I wasn't on the lamb. Did you ever wonder where that phrase came from? Neither did I and anyway I think that's a story best left for other, more adult publications.

It's some psycho kiddie babble. No wonder America's losing more of its mind every generation. When I was a child (oh, no, the first sign of old timer's disease, reminiscing about your childhood. How much time do I have left until I start stocking up on prune juice?) we had cartoons we could believe in. Roadrunner and his friend Dr. Wile E. Coyote-Super Genius, Foghorn Leghorn, Felix the cat and his perverted cousin Fritz. Now-a-days kids have animated cartoons that don't move (non-animated cartoons, next on Geraldo). Today there are teenage mutant ninja baseball card collecting turtles. I'm not sure, but I don't think my mother would have let me play with a mutant anything. Hell, she barely tolerated my human friends.

I slowly roll out of bed, stumble over a sneaker (the left one, that one always causes me problems), bang into the dresser, turn on my CD player, knock the headphones to the floor, pick it up and trip over the book I was reading last night. As I lie on the floor looking under my bed (have you ever wondered why all the dust settles there? Maybe it's tired.) I find the pen I lost a month ago. I use my briefcase to help me get up and it tumbles and slams down onto my fingers. All n' all not a bad start to the day.

I always get to the storage facility half an hour early. That way I can ease into the day, have some coffee and relax. Nah, I really do it so that I can hear tenants bang on the door and hear their muffled cries.

'I know he's in there. I can see his feet on the desk.' I always wonder how long they can bang on the door. I must admit that some people have great staying power. At nine I open the door.

'Didn't you hear me banging?' Always the first question.

'Yes.'

'Why didn't you let me in?' Because you're a psycho. No, he probably wouldn't want to hear that again this morning.

'We open at nine.' I say putting up the open sign.

'Well I've got a lot of important things to do today and can't waste my time banging on a door.'

'Did you know that we open at nine?'

'Erahyeah?'

'Then why did you spend your oh so valuable time banging on the door for half an hour?'

'Cause I thought you'd let me in.'

'We open at nine.' I finish hooking the open sign and walk into the building. The oh so important tenant follows close behind probably concerned that I'll change my mind and close.

'Ya gonna open the door?'

'What's your unit number?' A simple question. If you want to get somewhere you should know where it is. That's why I never go to Paraguay.

'I don't remember.' He says with a smile that only a dickheads mother could love.

'Then how do you expect to get there?'

'I know what the lock looks like. And it's back there.' He says pressing his face to the dusty glass. He looks at me and this oh so important person has a big dust stain across his forehead. Should I tell him that he looks like an

aging raccoon? Of course not, you know how I am.

'Thanks for narrowing it down for me.' Out of the 500 units in the facility, 500 of them are 'back there'. 'What's your name.'

'Smith.' (NOTE: The name has not been changed because he's too stupid to realize.)

'First name.' There is only one Smith in the facility but I'm just testing him. I've asked the owner if we could institute an IQ test for possible tenants.

'I'm sorry but you can not rent here because the results of this test say that you are so stupid you couldn't even get a government job,' would probably be a phrase I'd use often. But, after I gave it some thought, I figured that Biff, the owner, was also too stupid to pass the test.

'Danny.' Now normally this procedure takes a minute if I fall asleep in the middle. Look through the file, leaf through the tenant cards, let them up. But even before I started I knew two things that Danny didn't. OK you nitpickers, more than two things, but I do want to get on with the story. The two things that I know concerning him (there you bunch of nitpicking. . .) is unit number and that he hasn't paid his rent. I walk the eight feet from the file cabinet to the desk and find his card. Yep, marked in red. The official sign of the dirtbag.

'Rent's not paid this month.' I say wondering how many other important things he's going to accomplish today.

'Yeah, uh, my wives' cousins' aunt is sending the check from Chile.'

'Well, when your wives' cousins' aunts check from Chile gets here, you'll be allowed in.' I turn around and place the card back into the delinquent file and take a drink from my coffee (light, no sugar).

'Come on,' he whines. 'You can let me in.' I can do a number of things. Sometimes I even do a number of things at one time.

'Sorry.' I lean back with a little crooked smile on my face. It's not because I'm going to steal anything or take a bribe (hint, hint), but it's because I know what's going to come out of his face next.

'Come on, buddy, do me a favor.'

Now let's analyze that line for a minute. 'Come on, buddy, do me a favor.' Come. Well, that's out of the question right now. OK, OK, I won't get too microscopic with this sentence. Buddy and do me a favor. I'm not his buddy.

What's in it for me? I get more people asking me for favors. Watch, today I bet a bunch of people will ask me for favors. Some of them may even be my friends.

'Sorry.'

'Shit.' Now ladies and gentlemen, here comes the story. Sit back cause it'll be a long and boring one and if you fell asleep and cracked your head I'd feel bad. Yeah, sure. 'I've got to get my ladder so that I can. . .' I can't do it. The story was even longer and more boring than usual. I'll just cut to the end.

Five minutes later, I say 'Sorry.' He stares for a minute. Oooo, please not that. Anything but the stare of a fat, dopey, white guy. The funny part is that I'm not wearing my glasses and I can't see far enough to be shaken by that oh so evil stare.

Just as I get my feet back up on the desk the phone rings.

'Good morning, Wayward Storage and Promise You The World Truck Rental. My name is Chris, how may I assist you on this lovely day?'

OK, so that's what I'm supposed to say. What I really say is, 'Wayward Storage.' What I want to say is unprintable. Even in that publication that will publish the living on the lamb story.

'Do youse guys, you know, got any storage?' Take my word for it, he sounded even more like a moron than it reads. Now, I live and work in an area where the English language is an elective course of study. And, usually, I just let the 'youse' comment pass. I just get back in other ways.

I had a girl that used to cut my hair and she would use 'youse' all the time. If you noticed in that last sentence, I said used to cut my hair. I found myself shaking in the chair so bad that I really think that it was my fault that the hair cuts sucked. Yeah, sure.

I can't keep this oh so busy guy waiting for my reply. I know that he has to park his black Iroc-Z sideways in some handicapped zone soon.

'No,' I say in my most professional phone voice. 'Wees guys don't.' I really didn't mean to do it, but I guess deep down I'm just an asshole. OK, so not that deep down.

After the guy axes me if I'm a member of the club, The Society To Use Profane and Insipid Dialog (S.T.U.P.I.D.), I politely hang up. As I do, Biff walks in and I tell him the story. I think it's funny and would rather tell Biff a

story than listen to him. Sometimes Biff makes a stop sign look smart.

'I have a theory about the word youse.' Oh, oh, another one of Biff's theories. He once had a theory that said if you put a small electric wire in a puddle on a roof (Biff has a fetish with roofs that borders on the pathological) you should be able to find out where the water comes from. OK. He also said that Kennedy staged his own death so that he and Marylin Monroe could run off and live together. And how they talked Jim Morrison into staging his death because they wanted him and his music all to themselves. I get scared when I think that this guy signs my paycheck. But like I always say, if his father didn't put him into business he'd be working at McDonalds. And he wouldn't be the manager.

'OK,' I'm almost prepared. 'What's the theory?' I brace myself on the cheapo chair that squeals so loud when I roll them around that people on the phone ask if I'm beating a seagull.

'The word youse is the plural for you.'

'Yeah?'

'Yeah!'

'That's the theory?'

'Yeah!!'

'Oh.' I feel a headache coming on and he's only been here for ten minutes. Usually it takes twenty. I buy one of those industrial size containers of aspirin every other week. I think my brain is bleeding. 'That's it?'

'Yeah!!!'

'Excellent.' I smile and shuffle papers hoping that he'll walk away. He does.

'I'll be on the roof. I think that someondf sdfksf ftete yhfhnucv.' That's exactly what it sounded like to me. Biff is a world class mumblor. He'll be a foot away from me and I still won't be able to understand one word. Not that I'm really trying.

I'm alone again but I know this won't last for long, it never does. Someone has to come in, or even worse, call. You may be saying to yourself, 'Chris, surely you'd rather deal with these morons on the phone?'

That just shows why I'm a professional and you're still awed by the wonders of self storage. On the phone you can't see their eyes and as we all know, the

eyes are the windows to the brain dead. At least when they're in front of me I can see that they're one letter short of a complete DNA. On the phone, however, they must be dealt with like real people. Well, at least until I ask how many rooms of furniture they're storing and they don't know. I always ask,

'Are you robbing that house and that's why you don't know?' And you thought I took this job for the glamour. Nope, it's so I can come into full contact with people who think that people from outer space (the ones who helped the Greeks build their civilization) steal their mail. We had a long conversation about the different types of mail stealing space creatures. But that was on a different day. A real different day.

The door swings open and in steps Dom.

'Hi, Chris.' I sigh (OK, it was a grunt but sigh sounds so much nicer) and slowly get up from my desk. What can I tell you about Dom that you already don't know? Everything I guess. Dom is a truck driver. Dom lives in his truck. Dom believes that crickets flew at him in attack formation one night. Dom thought that a purple fish was following him one week (and, from time to time, make's return appearances). Dom said that someone was crawling through space between units where there wasn't any space. Dom doesn't do drugs. OK, so the last part I lied about. I just didn't want to give you a bad impression of him.

'Hi,' I say hitting the buzzer hoping that he'll go in soon. It's not that I don't like talking to Dom. . . yes it is.

'What's up?'

'Nothing.'

'What's Biff doing?'

'Nothing.'

'What'd ya do last night?'

'Nothing.'

'What are you doing tonight?'

'Nothing.' Are you getting the hang of this conversation yet? Sooner or later it gets to the reason for this conversation.

'Do you want some coffee?' This question is always followed by this phrase.

'You buy, I'll fly.' Which is followed by, 'Do you want a muffin?' Which is followed by, 'Can I get a muffin?' Which is followed by, 'Do you want the paper?' Which is followed by what boys and girls? Right! Nice concentration out there.

Sometimes I cut out the verbal cha-cha and just give him \$5. Not that it stops the conversation, but at least it speeds up the procedure.

'I'm soooo tired and I have a such a headache. But I didn't drink last night.' He always says that and always has a hangover. Sometimes I think that he actually does drink at night but just doesn't remember it in the morning. Then again it could just be a brain tumor. I told him that one day and he used a different name and went to the hospital. They found nothing. Like that was a big surprise.

Before he flies the twenty feet to the Dunkin' Donuts to get coffee, he has to make a dozen calls on the pay phone in the loading area. It's amazing the number of phone calls that man makes in a day. One day AT&T or NYNEX or Joe's Fone Co. and Sub Shop or whoever it is this year will present him with a golden quarter for most calls from a pay phone in a lifetime.

The door swings open and Dom asks if I have any aspirin. I give him some aspirin. We talk about the differences between real and pseudo aspirin. He seems to know everything about the different types of aspirin.

'Do you have any water?' Now Dom knows most of what goes into Wayward and he still asks 'if' we have these things. Once I said no and he corrected me, came behind the counter and found the water. That was the last time I said no because he pulled up a chair and made himself my best friend for the day.

I go back and get some water and hear the door open. I hear some mumbling so I figured that Dom is talking to himself. No, that was just a joke. Dom doesn't talk to himself. He talks to purple fish.

'He'll be right back.' Dom says. 'I wouldn't do that.' Dom warns.
BBBBRRRIINNNGGG. BBBBRRRIINNNGGG.
BBBBRRRIINNNGGG. 'I'm outta here.' Dom leaves.

I should explain. We have a buzzer from hell on the wall and if I don't respond within a reasonable amount of time, say three days, you are allowed to push the buzzer once for a very short period of time. Of course, this rule doesn't apply to Sid.

I should also explain that I hate the buzzer. But, I wouldn't want to see any harm, such as a short in the system, its guts ripped out by an evil doers bare hands or other such tragedy, come to it. And I'm going to stick by that story.

By the way, I was with you that night.

Sid, on the other hand, has never quite grasped the three day rule. Yesterday I was sitting at the Promise You The World Truck Rental desk (which is three feet from the Wayward desk) and the door opened and before it closed Sid was leaning on the bell.

'Shit, Sid,' which I said without looking at who it was. I'm going to be in one of those Time-Life Mystic Shit That Happens and Is Usually Found In Supermarket Tabloids But We Figured We Should Make A Few Bucks Off The Velvet Elvis Crowd commercials.

'A storage guy knows which asshole is coming into his building before he see him? Coincidence? We think not!'

'I didn't know where you were.' Sid looks at my face and sees that I'm not a happy buckaroo.

'So does that mean that when I go home at night you search the world looking for and pressing random buzzers until you piss off everyone?'

'Huh?'

'Let me translate. Have you been a dickhead all your life or is it something you've learned in adulthood?'

'Huh?'

'I bet when you go to the supermarket you take 15 items to the 12 and less register. Don't you?'

'Why, yes. You see if I have 6 bottles of Metamucil I count that as one.'

'Did you know that there is a new state law that says each individual item counts as one.'

'No!'

'Yeah, and if you break that law you have to buy an over ripe melon at twice the normal price and eat it before you leave.' I can see that look of 'I hate over ripe melons' on his one too many face lifts face. Men shouldn't get face lifts, it makes them look like Picasso's without the symmetry.

'You're kidding, right?'

'About that law. But there is a new law that says that merchants in this city

can kill one person who pisses them off a month without even getting arrested. It's called the 'Merchant Stress Reduction Law.'

'That's not a law.'

'Yes, it is.' I stare and smile at him. I can see him wish he had one of those six bottles of Metamucil right now. 'The only thing is that you have to use your own dumpster to dispose of the body. And you know Sid, this is a new month.'

'I don't have to take this.' He says pulling on the door. 'I'm going to have a word with Biff. Open this door.'

'Is your rent paid?' Ahhh, the ace in the hole for me.

'Well, arugh, ummmm, well, no.'

'Hahahahahahaha.'

'But Biff said that I couldÉ'

'Then go have your word with Biff.' I smile because I know that smiling will piss him off. And anyway I'm having fun.

'Where is he?'

'On the roof.'

'Ummm, I'm afraid of heights.'

'I know. Hahahahahahahahahahahahaha.' Boy, that sounded nasty, didn't it? 'Let me make a deal with you, Sid.' He just stares at me, a white knuckled death grip on the doorknob. 'I'll let you in if you promise that, no matter how long it takes, you will never touch that buzzer again.'

'I'm going to have to speak to Biff about the way you're speaking to me.'

'It's in English. But I think Biff already knows that.'

'LET ME IN!' He says turning the color of a carbon monoxide death. Just then Biff walks in looking as if a paint and roofing store blew up on him. Some of the stains on his clothes have been there for years. That's because he's never washed the damn things. Sometimes, when I get lonely, I take the clothes out of the utility closet and make it sit in a chair. It sure scares the mice away.

'Biff, I have a complaint.'

'You have a complaint? That's second door on the right. This is abuse.'

'See, that's what I mean. He's been nothing but rude to me.' I can see that Biff isn't sure what to do. He should do something to me, but his brain doesn't work fast enough to bother. His brain doesn't work fast enough to make toast. So, I figured that I'd help.

'His rent's not paid.' That's it! Game, set, match. Boy, I'm good. I could kill a tenant and Biff would applaud if I told him they were scum, oh sorry, arrears in payment. He'd even give me the weapon.

What happens now is that Biff talks to Sid about his late rent payment and other boring things. The great part is that it takes hours to complete. So, I get to sit back down and pretend I'm working.

As Sid wanders away bewildered and Biff just wanders, the phone rings and I answer it in my caring, people person tone.

'Hi Chris.'

'Hi Brian, how ya doing?' Brian is a nice guy whose life is worse than mine. Maybe that's why I like him.

'I'm wondering if you can do me a favor?' See, that favor thing again.

'What'd ya like?'

'Remember yesterday when you fixed my computer?' Do people think that I have no short term memory at all? Sometimes I get so insulted. Now where was I?

'Yeah?' I think that I did everything right. I reach into my pocket. Yep, I already cashed the check. Now I know that I did everything right.

It was a pretty normal fix. Other than multiple systems there were no real problems. I cleaned up and reset the system, gave him my bill and left. Brian explains a problem. Whoops, I forgot to put Mode 32 in. Oh well, no harm done. That was easy. NOTE: If you know little or nothing about the Macintosh, don't feel bad, just nod and chuckle knowingly. That'll get you through. It works for me.

'And,' he says putting me in the mind of Minolta. I think I watch too much TV. 'The Mac's beeping.'

'It does that sometimes.'

'No, its a high pitched, not a Mac beep. And its beeping all the time.' BEEP.
'See?' He was on the verge of a human system error.

'Well, I heard it. I agree, its not a Mac beep. I've never heard that one before.'
Now, I'm pretty surprised and confused. This is the kind of thing that can ruin
a day. I had him check for all alarm and timer functions. All off now. BEEP.

'It's driving me crazy.' He said. 'What is it?' I honestly didn't know. I tell him
to check what sounds he has. As the owner of all the sounds in the world,
who knows what he may have added after I left. His brother gave him sounds
o' plenty and he scurries through the internet on his own in search of that
perfect sound (nod and chuckle knowinglyÑyou're getting the hang of this).
And most of them were in his system before I cleaned it up.

'I don't know, let me finish the project I'm working on (sitting with my feet
on the desk, but he doesn't have to know that), I'll think about it and be over
after work.'

About an hour later I'm just about finished with the project (my legs were
getting cramps so I had to move them) and the phone rings.

'Ummm, Chris, I uh, don't need you to come in.'

'Good, you found out what it was?'

'Uh, yeah.'

'What was it?' I ask wanting to know. Wouldn't you?

'You're gonna think that I'm stupid.' Well, what would you think? 'I was
going to leave the office for awhile and I put my beeper on. When I was
waiting for the elevator, I heard the same beep the Mac was making.
Someone was trying to call me and if I don't answer, it beeps every two
minutes. I usually have the beeper on vibrate and I'm not used to the sound it
makes.'

All this and it isn't even noon yet.

The door opens and I snap to attention. All right, stop laughing. I opened my
eyes and pretended to be alert. Geez. In front of me are two people. The only
reason I say that is because we don't rent to many woodland creatures.

'This the storage place?' Says the speaking of the two.

'Yes,' I say walking past my desk. 'What can I do for you?' Put you out of humanities' misery? Point you in the direction of our closest competitor?

'Storage.'

'Yes, I understand that. What size are you interested in and when do you need it?' I try to get this out of the way early. If they want a size that right now I don't have, I can go back to my important projects. I think I was nearing the centerfold.

'Now. I calledÉ'

'I called.' The other member of this expedition said. These two words scared the shit out of me. They usually don't, but this woman sounded like two Buicks mating and was twice as loud.

'Shut up.' He says glaring at her. She mumbles something about sharp objects and major surgery but I don't pay that much attention. I've heard it all before. I've seen a soon to be ex-husband push a refrigerator off a truck barely missing his soon to be ex-wife. And they still hugged and kissed before they left the building. If you ever want to know exactly what your spouse says about you, rent a storage unit and bribe the manager to talk. It's amazing.

'I called.' She says watching a guy watch his stuff. It's like he thinks he's Elizabeth Montgomery as Bewitched and his shit is going to get to his unit by wiggling his nose.

'I'll take care of this.' He turns back to me and one of his pupils is smaller than the other. I'm not a doctor, but I think there's some neurological damage there. 'I,' he states. 'Called yesterday and talked to, ummm, ur, what was his name?' He grabs the woman by the shoulder.

'Biff.' She spits. She really does spit, I wasn't bringing dramatic emphasis to the sentence.

'Figures.' I mumble.

'Yeah, Biff says that you got a 5 by, what was it, Doris?' Doris just stares. Punch drunk, I'd say. 'Doris. Earth to Doris.' He says snapping his fingers in her face. I don't know about you, but I sure hate that. Snap your fingers in my face and I'd like to rip them off and stick them up your nose. The only reason I haven't done that so far is I'm not sure which one tops the rudemeter.

'Why don't you let me take care of it?' Doris asks and then thinks better of it. '10.'

'That's right, a 10 by 10.'

'No you idiot,' Not a good idea, Doris, I think. It's times like this that I wish I had a safety shield between them and me. I mean, even a salad bar has a protective shield. I know that I'm just as important as 6 week old parsley. But then again. . . 'A 5 by 10.'

'That's what I said.' He says pushing her in the general direction of hell. He looks back at me. I swear that his eyes have changed places. The quarter sized one is fading to the right and the pinpoint is somewhere near his fly.

'OK, listen,' I break in. It's not that I want to break in, it's just that we just vacuumed the floor. 'I'll show you a 5 by 10.' I hit the buzzer and the man jumped back and gasped. Electroshock flashbacks, I guess.

As we're walking down the hallway I can hear them whisper yelling. That's where they don't want to wait three minutes to fight, but they don't want me to call the cops or get out the hoses and hose them down. Half way to the unit, the man, whose name I heard was Pete (I thought of the moss between his ears and figured the name fit) said,

'This is just like D Block at Deer Island, Doris.' Just what I want to hear.

'Walk in front of me, please.' I say smiling. Oh, like you wouldn't? Get with the program. Deer Island is not a hunting resort folks. Stay with the tour you out of town visitors.

'This is kinda like it.' Doris said. 'But it looks more like a bowling alley to me.' Oh great, I'm giving 3-D Rorschach Tests. 'Yes, and the back of his head looks just like the entire family I chainsawed.'

'This is it.' I say working hard at keeping them in front of me. They talk about the unit. Fight about what they may or may not own. Finally, they come to an understanding,

'We don't know.'

'OK,' I say closing the unit door.

'So, its, what? \$27 a month?' Pete looks like this is the hardest he's thought since the guilty or innocent decision.

'No, you stupidÉ' Whap. A little smack to the side of Doris' head. When will she learn? Now they both look at me. Have you ever been surrounded by a pack of dogs? Well, that's what it was like with these two people staring at

me. But at least with the dogs you can rationalize your way out of a problem.

'Look, it's Lassie and she's naked.' They always fall for that one.

'The unit is forty-five dollars per month with a two month minimum.' A pretty straight forward sentence.

'What does that mean?'

'We need ninety dollars up front before you can sign the lease or move anything in.' I'm getting good at this straight forward sentence thing.

'No, I, ahhh, \$90? What's this minimum thing?' Pete says pulling Doris in front of him. Her high heels stutter on the wood floor.

'Minimum, in this case, means that two months is the least amount of time, money wise, that we will take from you so that you can move into a unit. That does not mean that you have to keep your stuff in here for two months, just that you have to pay for it.' I say keeping this parade of humanity moving towards the office. I may not have a sneeze guard, but I do have a safe distance.

'So, if I move out before the two months, I'll get money back?'

'No, the ninety dollars that you give to me when you move in, you will never see again.' It's kind of like a reverse hostage.

'But what is this minimum thing?' He asks again as Doris goes off to play the video game while Pete and I get to discuss high finance.

'The least amount of time that you pay for storage.' Haven't I said that before?

'But what is this minimum thing?'

'A minimum is the least amount available.' I didn't think he'd understand Webster's version either, but I had to try.

'So, does that meanÉ'

'I need another quarter.' Doris says poking her head into the office door.

'Shut up.' Pete says kicking it shut. He made guttural sounds and colorful phrases that you've all heard before. Use your imagination. Good one. 'What was I saying?' You're going to leave the poor self storage guy alone now? 'Oh, yeah,' sure like he remembers anything. 'What's this minimum shit?'

I don't know about you, but I'm positive that I'm having a brain hemorrhage. Let me recap what I've said about the word minimum. Least amount. Doesn't that pretty much explain it in this context? I thought so. So, I had no other alternative except to say,

'When do you need the unit?'

'Right the fuck now.'

'We don't have anything available.' Oh, sure, and you're all a bunch of Eagle Scouts. I went on to explain in a fast flurry how I didn't know that they needed it today and that Biff rented the one I showed them yesterday. OK, let me explain. A fast flurry translates into a lie. OK, you bunch of Goody-Two-Shoes what would you have done? That's what I thought.

After they leave, yelling at each other in some type of psycho shorthand, I try to get back to my storage calm. Breaking that calm is the telephone.

'Hi Chris, is Biff there?'

Oh oh, I think, it's Biff's wife. One thing should be explained. She calls Biff all the time with absolutely useless information. Oh, and there's hell to pay if Biff isn't here. Three days in a row last week she called within sixty seconds after he left. She was wondering why I laughed the last time. I asked her if she was parked outside with a carphone just making sure it really was him leaving.

Another time Biff wasn't here and she thought that she'd poisoned her kids. I asked her what she thinks she poisoned them with, got out a first aid book and started to dial an operator from the other phone.

'I gave them milk that expired yesterday.'

'Never mind.' I said to the very nice operator and told Cherry not to worry.

Another time Biff was supposed to be home at 12 noon. The telephone rang at exactly 12:01. It was her. She was furious that he wasn't home yet. She was going shopping with her friends and he promised that he'd watch the kids because she never gets to go anywhere within the hours of 1 and 3 on the second Thursday of the odd months and this was the time that she wanted to spend as play time with her lifelong friends who she met last week when she was taking little Brendon, but they call him Bo, from the morning day care to the afternoon/early evening day care before picking up Preston, but they call him Prep, and doing the same to him but at another school before taking Biff The Third, but they call him Trip, to the baby sitter so that she can go to the Watch Afternoon TV Until You Drop Social Club until Biff gets home.

NOTE: To all people who felt a severe social outrage and had thoughts of doing unmentionable things to me because of the last portrayal of a woman living off a man. Get a real job, will ya? ADDITIONAL NOTE (ADDED MUCH LATER): The portrait above is of one person, not an indication of today's modern women or the valiant women's movement on the whole. Some of my best friends are females. My mother was a woman. There, now can I have the cable remote back?

Now, back to your scheduled programming already in progress.

'You can hide your own Easter eggs.' Hahahahahaha. Just a joke. Here's what really happened. (For the set up of that joke call 1-900-OLD-TIMERS)

'He's on the roof.'

'Ohhh, he's always on the roof. What's he doing up there?' I'd guess hiding.

'Getting a tan. He has a beach chair up there.' Now that, to most normal people, would be considered 1) a joke or 2) a blatant lie. I prefer to think of it as a 1.

'Really! I'm going to have to talk to him about that.'

'I was just kidding, Cherry.' There was a dramatic pause here that made me uneasy. Was this the first joke that she'd ever heard? Ever got? Either way, it wasn't that damn funny. 'Is there anything I can help you with?' The moment I said that I wished I could highlight and erase the line. But, as my mother once told me,

'You bring it upon yourself, Chris.' Of course, she was talking about the time I climbed up a street sign and the sign and brackets slid down the pole and trapped my toes under it. I was trapped for about an hour and my toes turned some pretty cool colors later. The next day I got to stay out of school. I kept climbing that pole trying to make it happen again, but it never did. So, I guess I really don't bring it upon myself. Isn't logic wonderful?

'Well,' Cherry said calmly. 'The stove blew up.'

'Are you still in your house?'

'Yes.'

'Get out.' I wonder if I'll get on that TV show '911' because of this?

'No.' I guess I won't be getting on '911'.

'Yes.' I'm in command now. 'Gas leaks are a real problem when your stove explodes.' Seems logical, doesn't it? But what was that I said about logic a minute ago?

'Its not a gas stove,' Now here is where I start having trouble. 'Its electric.'

'Cherry, electric stoves don't blow up.'

'This one did.' There are only two things I can think of to do 1) get these people, the loved ones of the man who signs my paycheck, out of the house and 2) get off the phone.

'Well, then,' I say with my most concerned modulation. 'To be on the safe side, get out of the house.'

'It really didn't explode.'

'Cherry, did it explode or didn't it?'

'It kind of exploded.'

'Then get out of the house. There could be random electrical charges rushing through the house aiming for the children. Look, there goes one.'

'Actually, it kinda went phmopfh.'

'Huh?'

'Phmopfh.'

'OK,' I thought about this one for a second and I figured that, just like the poisoned milk, this was just a false alarm. But, boy if I'm wrong, BOOM. Hey, it's a chance that I'm willing to take. 'So it really didn't explode?'

'No.'

'It went phmopfh, right?'

'Yes.'

'Is it a new stove and this is the first time you've used it?'

'Yes.'

'Have a nice life. I'll tell Biff you called.' I hang up the phone and think about

nothing. I'm trying to put myself in my tenants (and bosses' family's) place.

I sat in my chair and felt like a small truck has been pulled from one ear to the other. I get like this sometimes (usually after I've been visited by someone who's played 52 pick-up once too often). The door to the facility opens. Don't these people have any concern for my well being? No, of course not. These people are selfish, that's what I say. We should change the name of the industry to Selfish Storage.

A tenant walks in who, along with her husband, are among the nicer tenants in the facility.

'Hi,' I say, actually greeting a tenant.

'Hi Chris,' She says with her checkbook already drawn. Checkbook out is Biff's favorite position for a tenant. She doesn't seem her regular self today. I just smile and continue to do my job without incident because I know how I hate it when people say to me, 'What's wrong, Chris?' when my only crime has been not telling a joke. Hey, sometimes I just don't have anything fucking funny to say.

I watch her start to fill out her pale blue check. Her handwriting is perfect script. Good handwriting is like an art. Sometimes I wish that I was taught handwriting that you could actually read. Maybe they tried, but I doubt it.

I remember my first grade teacher whacking me in the side of the head, taking the sewerage pipe sized pencil out of my left hand and putting it in my right. All the time this was happening she called me the devil. I also remember my mother telling me that Kennedy had horrible handwriting, too. Oh good, set me up for the kill. And a journalism professor telling me that I was good, but if I turned in one more hand-written paper he'd flunk me, rip off my nose and turn it upside down so that when it rained next, I'd drown. I love inventive threats.

She's almost finished filling out the check, looks up at me and says,

'My husband died last week.' Crossing his name off of their joint checking account. The silence of the moment adds to the finality of a small thing blue line.

'I hate this phone.' Guess who said that? 'Wayward Storage.'

'I'm calling from Hawaii.'

'Nice to hear from you Ms. Calling. I'm Zell from Boston. What can I do for

you?'

'What? Yeah, I'm calling from Hawaii.'

'Didn't we already establish that?'

'What? No, I'm Sandy, calling from Hawaii.' I know what she really means, boys and girls, but I figured why not.

'Well, take a shower, get the sand off your body and call me back.'

'What? Wait. I'm Sandy calling from Hawaii.'

'Who's on first?'

'What?'

'OK, play time is over,' I'm already bored and I'm pretty sure I know who this is and I know what they want. It's not going to be a pretty story, parental discretion advised. Nah, not really, but it does great things for the ratings of TV shows, so I figured what the hell. 'What's your unit number?'

'It's either 585 or 541.' I bet you're saying to yourself, 'well, Chris that's not too bad. Ms. Calling has given you something to go by.' Again, my poor, misguided friends, she's been pounding too much sand into her brain. We have no 585 or 545.

'What's the last name?' Does everyone understand just how easy a question that last one is? Good. Read on.

'Well, I'm a dancer, see, and I could have left it under Sandy Beach, which is the name I'm using now orÉ' I had her card on my desk just waiting for the proper response. After about eight tries,

'We have a winner.' I cry. Visions of Bob Barker kicked me in the head.

'What can I do for you?' Now wasn't that the first question that I asked? I thought so. Life is a circle and all that crap.

'I know I'm behind in my rent. What do I owe now?'

'Six hundred and forty five dollars.' I state. Her card looks like it's bleeding to death.

'\$645.00? How did that happen?' Let's see, rent is due each month, if you don't pay it, it increases. Hmmm, I'm going to have to check on that though.

Thank God for me that Harvard Business School is close by.

'You haven't paid your rent lately.' I've found that the simplistic approach is the best.

'It's my shit in there.' Oh no, that phrase scares me. I've heard horror stories about other storage facilities. Too graphic to go into here. Call 1-900-YO-SLIME for a complete list. 'You're not gonna sell me shit, are you?'

'You are scheduled for sale next month unless we receive full payment before the 6th.'

'It's my shit. My shit's my shit, so don't sell my shit.'

'What?'

'You can't sell my shit. All the shit I own in the world is in that fucking place. I've been paying for my shit for a long time now. You can't sell my shit. My shit's my shit so don't sell my shit.'

'Are you sending a full payment before the 6th?' I'm laughing so hard that I think my socks are sweating.

'Yeah, you'll get you fucking money. Just don't sell my shit. Because,'

'I know, your shit's your shit. So, you don't want us to sell your shit.'

'Yeah!' She seems truly amazed that I understood what she was saying. Frankly, so am I.

'Then make sure we receive your payment before the 6th.'

'But I'm calling from Hawaii.' Why do people have to tell you when they're calling long distance. Do they think that you'll talk faster?

'Last time I looked it was part of the United States. That means that they have the use of the U.S. Mail. You have two weeks to get it here. If you're concerned, send it Next Day.'

'How much does that cost?'

'Probably less than it would cost to replace all your shit.'

Biff comes into the office, a caulking gun on his hip like some Old West roofing desperado. 'Lunch time.' He was picking up the phone with a hand that has enough silicone on it to enlarge all the breasts in the Third World.

'What do you want?'

That question may not seem stupid to you, but then again, after reading about Biff for a while, hopefully it does. The reason it's stupid is that I get the same thing for lunch every day.

'Tuna.' I'll just wait a second and let him contact the sandwich shop.

'Hi, mmm, is this Fred?'

'No, its Ernie.' I can hear the 'what a jerk' tone in Ernie's voice. Only two people work at this shop and Biff always picks the wrong name.

'Oh, yeah, hi. I'll have, let's see, it's Thursday and that means that we'll be eatingÉ' Each week his family has a scheduled menu that is never varied. If Biff ever had a hit man after him I'd hope the killer would give some money back. It'd just be too damn easy. 'And, Chris,' he looks at me like he's hungry. Or doped up on roofing supplies. 'Would you like anything on your sandwich?'

I hope that you people have learned that this is a stupid question. Thank you, my numerous hours slaving over lesson plans hasn't been a total loss. But, for you remedial readers, it's a stupid question because,

'I always get it plain, Biff.'

'Oh, that's right.' He finishes the order and turns to me. 'One day I'll remember that.' I should only live that long.

Later that same day this is a phrase I personally heard:

'Iwanttorentalaoneofthosetruckforyoucommander.'

Don't worry, I didn't break my space bar, that's how it really sounded. I won't bore you with the details of the Promise You The World Truck Rental sales pitch (but let me tell you that it's full of lies and people renting you the truck laugh at you the moment you leave. The phrase 'look, we fooled another one,' is actually part of the training program).

'For the truck you want that will be \$1145.00 and that includes absolutely nothing that you heard about in the television commercials.'

'Eleventy hundred and four hundred dollars? Oh no, general, you must be wrong.' Have you ever noticed that when you can't understand a person, like they have a small reptile in their mouth, the moment the talk turns to money you can. Well, to a point. I guess that money makes the tongue go around,

the tongue go around, the tongue go around. Sorry, life is a Cabaret you know.

He reaches over and starts taking my price book. I hate when people touch my price book. I don't go to their job and touch their stuff, do I? That's why it's called 'my' price book. I pull the book back.

'Nope,' I close the book and put it under the counter.

Time for a test. If you've been really paying attention to the story so far, you'll be able to tell me what happens next. I'll wait. Hum de hum de dum de de do. OK, pencils down. That's right, he says,

'Buddy, a favor for me. You can do better for me, captain. I want to give you my business because you my friend.'

'Sorry, I have no control over the price.'

'Lieutenant, you are a man of power.'

'I just read the book. I don't set the rate. Sorry.'

'Oh come on, Lieutenant Junior Grade,' is it my imagination or am I going down in rank each sentence? 'I want to give you my business. The guy down the street, a total stranger to me, not a friend like you, Sergeant, gave me the same truck for one a hundred twenty seven dollars.'

'Sounds great,' I say watching a tenant give me the international sign for 'open the loading door' or 'I've got six mice down my pants' I always get confused. 'My advice would be to go for it.'

'Oh, my friend, but I want to give you the business, private.' That's it, I've reached the end of the line. I think that the only thing under a private is a high ranking government official.

'Sorry.' For the first time in a while, I'm happy that the phone rang. I get to walk away gracefully. OK, I stumbled away with a distinct limp, but it's my limp. Well earned, I might add.

'Wayward Storage.'

'I'm reading you ad in the Yellow Pages. It says you got boxes. You got boxes?' And people have the nerve to come up to me on the street and say things like, 'Gee Chris, why so edgy?' They just don't understand. But, I give in and answer their question.

'Yes, we do.' I don't think that grown people should spend their time discussing boxes. But, I do.

'I'll be right over.' He hangs up in the adrenaline rush that you get from fresh, new boxes. But that's just a guess.

Fifteen minutes later a battalion of box people burst through the door. If you've never seen a frenzy of people buying boxes, call me and I'll make an appointment (for a nominal entertainment fee). It kicks the hell out of watching sharks smash their faces into steel cages.

These are empty boxes of various sizes. They weigh almost nothing and don't make much noise. If you look at them you should be able to figure out what size you need. You shouldn't have to touch them. We have a nice display. It's like a little box museum. The little ones sit on top of the big one. Very good symmetry. An eye pleasing display all the way around.

But that isn't enough for the raging box maniacs. They have to lift and separate the boxes from their display. Most times putting the larger boxes on top of the smaller ones. Can you imagine? Won't these people ever learn? They twist the boxes in every direction treating them with the same attention to detail a normal person would to a fine diamond. The three C's of diamond buying become the three C's of box buying.

1) 'Can my ceramic bust of Elvis, with the glow in the dark eyes, fit in this box?'

2) 'Could I squeeze my 19' Trinitron with the hydraulic swivel base and 43,000 channel speed demon remote into that 18' box?'

3) 'Costs what?'

'\$2.50 for a box?' Comes the question. I just nod. 'That's fuckin' stoopid.' It's like I'm on Pee Wee's Playhouse, 'It takes one to know one'. 'What if I buy 10? Will you give me a break, buddy?' I'm thinking about changing my name to Buddy just to make it easier on all my wonderful friends. Yeah, sure.

'Nope.'

'That's fuckin' stoopid.'

'Yep.' I'm obviously a very high pressure salesman. Oh, sorry, not a salesman, an account executive. And with that, they leave talking about going to buy 300 cases of Budweiser and using those cases. Well, once they're empty.

The afternoon starts off slowly and that's always a bad sign.

'Do you have truck number 977542371675503084120?' People at Promise, as we in the industry call it, have been trained not to say hi. Why waste time on people who probably hate you and know that you're a liar?

'What was that number again?' I know that this pisses them off. Wouldn't it piss you off? I thought so.

'977542371675503084120.' He says a little perturbed.

'Oh, 977542371675503084120. Nope. Went to district Saturday with DT drivers.' Whoa, techno-jargon. Let me take a second to explain. 'I don't have the fucking truck, you chum brain. You ordered it out of here yourself, you anal retentive fathead. This is the third time this week you've asked me about it, you visitor from the planet Dumbshit.' Now do you understand all this techno-jargon? I knew that you would.

Now I've been nice up until this point. OK, I've been nice up to this point to a point. But now he asks me the question that should never be asked when I've given you the definitive answer to a simple question.

'Are you sure?'

'No, you talking mold, I've been lying to you all week. I've been keeping a 15 foot truck in my attic. The amazing part is that I don't have an attic.'

'Well, arumph,' he says doing his best Goofy imitation. 'I guess I'll have to keep looking for it.'

'No shit.'

'What are your sizes?' A person with comfortable shoes and a 'What are you looking at, shithead?' t-shirt on says.

'They're on the wall.' I say pointing in the general direction that she's looking. I've come to the conclusion that people can't see anything until you point at it.

'Is that the sizes?'

'Yes.' I often stop and replay sentences' people say in my head. I don't do it for pleasure, I do it for research. Yeah, sure. I really do it so I don't have to listen to anything else they say.

'These are in footage?'

'Yes?' I'm really not sure if that's the correct answer. Because, actually, the units are in Boston.

'How big is a 5x10?' She says looking at, I'm not really sure, but she thinks she was looking at something and that's the important part. It's a flow thing.

I have to ask you a question now. How would you answer the question, 'how big is a 5x10?' Not as easy as it seems, is it? You'd say things like,

'What the fuck are you talking about, you idiot? How big do you think it is? Its 5x10.' or

'Its five feet by ten feet. What did you expect, you idiot?' As you can see, you've limited yourself. You've got to be able to have grace under pressure and be able to call people idiots without them knowing. I'll show you how a seasoned professional gets out of it.

'When do you need it?'

'Right now.'

'We don't have anything available.' Ta da. Isn't great to watch professionals in action?

'This weather sucks.' Says a happy person dropping off a truck. I must admit that it is kind of strange weather, even for Boston. It's mid-April and its snowing. 'I should have stayed in Florida.' They'll get no argument from me.

'Did you fill the truck up with gas before you dropped it in my lot?'

'Huh?' Now you tell me, did I explain myself well enough? Maybe I explained too much. Let me begin again.

'Ja fill da truck, dude?'

'Oh. Yeah. Gas. Fill. Tank.' I knew that I'd get my point across. Eventually. 'Oh, one more thing, driving through New York I got some graffiti on the truck.' Boy, those graffiti artists are getting bold. They don't even wait for the truck to stop.

I go out to the truck and there's graffiti on it. In it. Around it. Probably under it, but I don't care all that much to check. The amazing part was that there was graffiti on the windshield. I could see this guy driving down the interstate with a graffiti artist hanging on for dear life. Well, I thought it was

funny.

I take care of the paper work and start looking for the graffiti remover. I can't find it anywhere. Biff hides this stuff like it was gold. So, as a last resort, I use paint thinner. I'm not going to bother with the sides of the truck, but I feel that it's a safety hazard to have graffiti on the windshield. Actually, I don't care, but I figured that if I get it off the truck before Biff sees it I won't have to listen to a theory.

So there I am. Me, paint thinner, paper towels, a truck and graffiti. It's a fine day for a battle. The snows not that deep but it sure makes people drive like dummies. It's like they've never seen snow before. Come on bucko, it snowed six feet two months ago and you drove fine. I think that there's a gland, the snow driving gland, that turns on in November and off by Saint Patrick's Day. It's just a theory now, I'm looking for a government grant to study it further. If you are in charge of large government grants, call 1-900-RIP-OFF-U.S.

I'm balanced on the bumper of two trucks, paint thinner resting on the windshield pouring little bits out and wiping. Not very challenging, but its boring. Just when I'm getting into the rhythm of things, some guy comes over and touches my arm. What happened next I'm going to explain once, but extremely slowly.

My arm slipped from the truck spilling large quantities of paint thinner into my face. That, in and of itself, isn't that much fun. It's like getting hit in the eye with a slush ball but it smells worse. As I'm spitting paint thinner out of my mouth (it tastes real bad, so, please, I'm a professional, do not attempt this trick at home) the man who started this chain reaction of possible slow and painful death (for him not me. Nothing's going to get in the way of finishing this day) says to me,

'Do you know what time the bus passes by?' I wanted to light this guy on fire.

'Do you see a fucking T patch on my shoulder, you spud?' I shove past him and hose myself down. The good thing is the days almost over.

'Sorry I can't stay and help you, Chris, but my wife wantsfgg gjdjrg bmfgt dgjgtgcb.' Biff mumbling out the door. It's good to know that I can always count on Biff if I ever run into real problems. Like the time I slipped and banged my leg on a truck. I had to go to get stitched up and had a tough time walking, but Biff called me ten minutes after I got back from the hospital asking if I was coming back that day. But, what would you expect from a person with the IQ of oatmeal.

'Chris, how ya been?'

'Shitty. And you?'

'Fanfuckingtastic.' I'm going to have to check the dictionary for that one. 'I've started a new band with some of the hipper dudes at the investment firm.' Hipper dudes? Investment firm? This isn't going to be a very fun adventure for old Chris, boys and girls.

'Great.' I say with as much enthusiasm as I could muster. Which is about as much as I get for embalming lessons.

'Yeah, wanna listen to the tape?' He should have just said, do you want me to tell you all about the great opportunities in potential growth markets? 'Its great. We call ourselves HWA and we sing and rap about what we know.' Well, I think, at least it'll be a short album. 'We want you to take us into the studio and do your magic for us.' I think that my magicians' license expired. But I'll give you a referral, call 1-900-SLIME-BAG. 'Remember what you did for E' I hate being reminded of things that I've done by people that I don't know.

Well, I must say that they had a concept. The great things about concepts are that you never have to explain them. It's just a concept. The name of the band is Honkeys With Attitude. A takeoff of NWA. They sing/rap/wail like road kill about things they know about.

They had wonderful songs like, Tax Shelters (Unsafe For The Unwashed Masses), bound to be a big hit. But then I'm still on pins and needles about the possible Knack reunion. (Don't Step On My) Kentucky Bluegrass Blues; Lime In Your Beer; Summertime Yacht Racing; It's A Long Hard Climb In Daddy's Company; The Night My Food Processor Died; You Can't Keep A Suburban Boy In The Country; Hot Time At The Expanding Markets Seminar and other questionable reasons to live.

'Ummm,' I lied.

'So you loved it.' Have you every noticed that people like this never ask questions? OK, so that's a generalization and as usual when I generalize, I don't care.

'Ummm,' I'm getting good at this lying thing.

'So, I'll book some time in the most exclusive studio in Boston and we'll, ha ha, lay out some road.'

'Lay down some tracks.' NOTE: Another generalization coming upÑnot for

the faint of heart. Have you ever noticed that these people are like Color-Forms stick on people. Very colorful, but flat and plastic.

'That's what I said.' Of course, I just heard you wrong. I guess I didn't get my ears at Dr. Whata D. Ickhead, Fine Body Parts At Extreme Cost.

'Yeah. I'll check my schedule and I'll have my service call your services service so that they will get together and service each other.'

'My thoughts exactly.' Now that's a frightening thought.

Finally, it's 6PM. Closing time. Time for me to, well, close. It's never as exciting as you think it'll be. But at least I'm done dealing with people today. And what a day it was.

'Oh, no,' I say as the phone rings.

'Wayward Storage.'

'Oh, great, you're open.'

'We closed at 6.' Isn't this the flip side of how I started the day?

'I just have to get one thing.' She whines. I hate when people whine.

'We're closed.'

'Then what are you doing there?' Ahhh, when in doubt and close to death try to confuse your opponent. But you can't fool me. You know how my brain is.

'Leaving.' What a put down. Let's get the Hall of Infamy for that one. Wait a second, let me jot that one down. Leaving. I'm going to have to remember that.

'But it's a matter of life and death.' So's a gun shot wound. It doesn't matter that we're closed, their shit's their shit and they've got to get their shit.

'We're closed.'

'It'll only take a minute.'

'Listen, would you call K-Mart and tell them to stay open for you?'

'No.'

'Same thing. Bye.' It happens all the time. I've been here at midnight, six

hours after we've closed, and had people call. Don't these people have lives?

Biff and I were cleaning the building on day when we were closed. Closed sign up. Holiday closed sign up. And this drainage ditch of a man bangs on the door like the building was on fire and he's trying to save the cute and fuzzy puppies. After five minutes, and at least two broken fingers (but this is just an estimate. Your breakage may vary), he went to a payphone and called.

'Biff?'

'No, its Chris. What do you want Floyd?'

'I wanna get in.'

'We're closed.'

'But I want to get in.' Oh, why didn't you say that in the first place. In that case,

'We're closed. Didn't you read the closed sign?'

'Yeah, but I saw Biff's car.'

'Oh, and the sign said 'Closed except for Floyd'?'

'No.' He seems very confused, so I'm relived, everything is status quo. 'But I want to get in.'

'Floyd, I'm busy. We open in the morning at nine. Go home. Its time for Mister Ed and your session. The doctor is waiting.'

'OK.' And Floyd goes home singing the theme from Mister Ed.

'Ohhhhh, A horse is a horse, of course, of course, but no one can talk to a horse, of courseÉ' Everyone join in.

So, I get off the phone with the latest person to break my inner peace, put on my headphones (I'm listening to 'XL' by Blue Flannel A great band. Go out and buy their CD. NOTE: I am in no way connected. Geez, I mean connected to the band nor do I get any money if you rush out and put the on the charts with a bullet. But I am open to contributions, guys, if you know what I mean. Nudge, nudge, wink, wink) and head home.

I'm home (Gee, things move quickly on the written page). The only place where I truly pay rent. I can keep my answering machine on with its cute message to get my head together. Nah, I do it cause I don't want to talk to

anyone. I had a big time famous radio personality friend of mine leave a message that says,

'This is Harvey Wharfield for WCAZ, the world's first answering machine in search of really big ratings. And because of that, no one is available to answer your call right now. But if you'd leave a message at the cue, your request will be played, or at least answered. This concludes the broadcast day of WCAZ. Thanks for listening.'

The last sentence was an on the spot improv by Harv. That's why you call in the true professionals.

I'm just starting my early evening nod when,

'Did you go down to my apartment today?'

'What?' Standing in the doorway is Dennis. He lives downstairs. He has a key to my apartment. I've forgotten why.

'Did you go down to my apartment today?' Dennis stomps like he's talking to a child. I heard him the first time, but I thought that it was too stupid a question to really exist.

'Dennis, I just got home from work. What's the problem?' We have a key to his apartment because that's where all the fuses are.

'Someone was in my apartment.'

'How the fuck do you know that?' If you'd ever seen Dennis' apartment you'd be afraid, be very afraid. Bill, my roommate, walked down there to change a fuse one day and came up as white and dry as cotton.

'What's the matter, Bill?'

'Dennis' He was stuck with the one word blues.

'Quite a trip, isn't it?'

'That was the messiest place I've ever seen. I don't know how he'd know if the Army had maneuvers there.'

'I think its his highly trained sense of smell.'

But Dennis is screaming about someone being in his apartment.

'Did they steal anything?'

'No.'

'Did they touch anything?'

'No.'

'Then leave me alone.' I close my eyes and pretend to sleep. It's a long shot but one that I had to take. Of course, it didn't work. Dennis sits down. I pretend not to notice and Night Court comes on. It the episode where Dan becomes a male escort. Dennis says,

'I thought about doing that once?' What? Hiring a male escort? I had to know.

'What?'

'I thought about becoming a male escort.' He says with a serious straight face.

'Thank God it was only a thought.' Dennis takes that as an insult. Could be.

'What? I'd be good at it.' He says getting his verbal chops ready. I thought, why bother. Cause its fun to be a bad boy.

'Dennis,' I say with utmost concern. 'You are a good looking guy, but you have no verbal skills, you have no humor and very little taste.' I think that I tempered that well with the 'you are a good looking guy' part, don't you?

A few minutes later, Dennis falls asleep. I mean dead wood. I'm not saying Dennis is dead wood. Unless you think I should. You people are a nasty lot. To say that Dennis was snoring would be an understatement. To say that Logan Airport called and asked us to quiet down, well, that would be the truth. He was jamming the radar and a plane just landed in Fenway Park.

After a minute of this, my ears ringing, I smacked Dennis on the shoulder, my hand stings.

'Wake the fuck up and get out of my house.' Pretty straight forward I think.

'Huh?' Great, I'm glad to see he's back too normal.

'Go downstairs and sleep. I've got my Devil worshipping clique coming over tonight and you're not a member.'

'OK,' he says lumbering off the couch. 'Its just such a comfortable couch.' He walks to the hallway and just as he hits the back door I hear, 'Owwwww. My

arm.'

With that, I decide to retire to my room and pretend I'm sleeping. I walk in the room, flip the light on and fall over my briefcase. Those fuzzies are still under my bed.