SHAKING DOWN THE GOON

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A PECULIAR INCIDENT OCCURRED during my first semester at El Camino Community College in Torrance, California. My friend Bill and I were taking a Psychology class taught by a professor named Dr. McCrary. Every Tuesday and Thursday Bill and I would walk from the parking structure onto campus, past a tennis ball court, up a flight of stairs, and onto the second floor of the Behavioral Science building where the Psychology class was located. We would perform this routine at exactly the same time every morning (from about 9:50 A.M. to just before 10:00 A.M.).

One particular Tuesday, at around 9:55, we reached the end of the tennis ball courts where a whole crowd of students were always walking at around this time. One student—who had a terminally serious expression plastered on his face—brought attention to himself as we passed. He was tall, lanky, and his nationality seemed to be Middle Eastern. With his gaze locked firmly on the ground, he whizzed past us and muttered something that sounded like, "How's it goin', *faggots*?"

Bill and I looked at each other oddly, but we assumed we had either misheard him or that he had been talking to someone else in the crowd (or perhaps even to himself, since his gaze had never once lifted from the ground). We put it out of our minds the second after it occurred. Besides, we had to go to class and study sociopathic behavior. We didn't have time for nonsense.

The following Thursday, at the same time of the morning, we were walking past the tennis courts when we saw the funny looking Middle Eastern dude once again. The angry expression on his mug from the day before had only become more intense. He whizzed past us at the same lightning speed, but this time paused long enough to look us in the eyes. "Hey, *girls*," he said with a booming voice, "did you leave your panties at home?"

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Bill, who can fly off the handle at the drop of a phoneme, spun around and said, "Hey, what the fuck did you say?" But this guy was so damn quick that by the time we turned all the way around he was already at the far end of the tennis courts! It was amazing. I'd never seen anyone walk that fast.

Since we couldn't be late to class we tried to push this incident out of our minds again, at least for the time being. But now we were disturbed. Why was this guy terrorizing us? It made no sense.

Bill and I, not being people who like to be disturbed, had to do *something* about it. Later that afternoon, on the way home in Bill's car, I compared the situation to the Rodney King beating (which had occurred only a couple of months before). "We've got to get this guy on videotape, if only to laugh at his ugly face later on. Boy, that guy's a goon!" Well, Bill loved the idea, and devised a plan by which I would follow him with the video camera hidden behind my back so The Goon wouldn't be able to see it. If our suitor said anything derogatory again, at least we'd have it on tape so we'd know we weren't hearing things.

The next Tuesday, at around 9:50 or so, Bill and I stood by the tennis courts waiting for our friend to show. At 9:55 on the dot The Goon himself appeared. Just as we'd planned, Bill was standing in front of me. The camera was behind my back. As The Goon passed he suddenly turned, cocked his fist back, and knocked Bill in the jaw! Bill planted his meaty hands on The Goon's chest, pushed him away, and said, "Hey, what the fuck's your problem?"

"I don't like *faggots*!"

"What makes you think I'm a faggot?"

"You look like one!"

"You're fuckin' crazy, man!"

"Yeah . . . w-well, I don't like *faggots*!" Sweat now poured down this guy's face. His eyes bulged out of his head like cracked cue balls. "And I think you're a god damn *faggot*!" ("Faggot" becomes a very funny word when you hear it consecutively like this, especially when it's ejaculated with such passion.)

"Well," Bill said, "we'll see what the Dean has to say about it when we show him this tape." At this point Bill gestured at the camera. In slow motion, The Goon turned his gaze towards the lens. (This was a wonderful moment. In fact, I'm looking at the tape right now.) The dark fury in his face melted into a sickly pallor. His jaw dropped. Literally. "C'mon," Bill said, and

gestured for me to follow him—as if we were on our way to see the Dean at that exact moment. . . .

The Goon dashed after us. No longer was he strutting around like a testosterone-pumped Alpha male, oh no. Now he was trailing behind us like a wounded puppy. He was reduced to *whining*. "Oh, *please* don't show that to the Dean! I'll get kicked out if you do."

"Oh, well," Bill said, "you should've thought of that before you did what you did."

"No, no, *please*, you don't understand. I'll do anything you ask."

Bill waved his hand in the air, dismissing him with silence.

The Goon played his last hand. "I-I'll even give you money." He pulled out his wallet and showed it to Bill.

Bill glanced at it, looked away, then did an instant double-take. He walked over to the open wallet and looked inside. "How much you got in there?"

"I only got sixty dollars, man."

"That'll do," Bill said and plucked the money out of the wallet. He stuffed it in his pocket. "Now go away. Don't bother us anymore." He waved The Goon away with an imperial sweep of his hand.

The Goon said, "Oh, thank you, thank you. Sorry, man. Hey, you know, I've just had a bad day is all." He looked over at me and apologized into the camera. Bill told him to go away again. Finally, The Goon took his advice and hightailed it out of there. I just stood there and taped his long walk past the tennis courts and into the parking structure. On the tape you can clearly see bemused students glancing back at the camera, and then at The Goon, wondering what the hell's going on.

The last words heard on the tape are Bill's: "C'mon, you've got enough. We're gonna be late." So I shut off the tape, and we went to class to hear another lecture on sociopathic behavior, as if we hadn't had enough firsthand experience already.

After class Bill and I approached Dr. McCrary about this strange incident. I told him the whole story, just like I'm telling it to you now, and after he got done wiping away the tears of amusement McCrary said, "It sounds like he was 'projecting.' He could very well have been *attracted* to one of you."

"Hell, I could've told you that," I said. "It was probably *me*. All the lads are attracted to me for some reason. It must be my shapely butt." I could see Dr. McCrary eyeing my butt for a moment, then I said, "By the way, I've already

got a title for the tape. 'Rodney King Redux.' You think *Funniest Home Videos* will want to buy it?"

After class Bill and I split the money between us. (It was actually only fifty-six dollars, not sixty as The Goon had claimed.) I got twenty-eight, Bill got twenty-eight.

But that's not the end of the story. A few hours after we shook down The Goon, Bill related this tale to a couple of guys he was playing basketball with. He showed the videotape to his friends, all of whom instantly pointed at the screen and yelled, "Hey, that's *Bunty*! He's this crazy guy who almost got kicked out of El Camino for cheating!"

Ah, so now we knew why he'd been so upset by our threat!

A few months later I bumped into Bunty in a Fox Drugs store in downtown Torrance. He was standing behind the counter. He obviously recognized me. I asked him to climb a ladder so he could pull down a storage box located on a high shelf. After he brought the box down I said, "Nah, I don't really want the box. I just wanted to look at your lovely butt." Then I got the hell out of there before Bunty could leap over the counter and run after me.

I never saw Bunty, or his shapely butt, ever again. As far as I know, he hasn't seen mine either.