

I GOT AN UGLY TEDDY BEAR FROM A CLAW MACHINE AT A FAMILY BUFFET...NOW WHAT?

By Bradley Walton

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I GOT AN UGLY TEDDY BEAR FROM A CLAW MACHINE AT A FAMILY BUFFET...NOW WHAT?

A Ten-Minute Comedy Monologue

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SYNOPSIS: You go to a family buffet restaurant. There is a claw machine, and teetering near the edge of the prize chute is the most hideous stuffed bear you have ever seen. What if some poor child was to win that bear and be traumatized for life? Or worse...what damage might be inflicted on the economy if the claw machine sits idle because no one wants to risk accidentally winning the bear? For the greater good of all, you nobly take it upon yourself to extract the bear...and your voyage of self-discovery begins.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 either; gender flexible)

NARRATOR (m/f) Has delusions of grandeur and an exaggerated perception of reality.

SET: Bare stage.

COSTUME: Tacky dress clothes.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I really thought after writing *I Won A Giant Inflatable Banana at the State Fair...Now What?* and *I Got a Balloon Animal From a Clown at a Fast Food Restaurant...Now What?* that I was done with this character. I definitely never envisioned a trilogy, however loose it may be. (Each installment stands completely on its own.) Is this the end? I have no idea, but it is becoming apparent that I really seem to connect with the narrator. I have no idea what that says about me.

NARRATOR: The instant I walk through the door, my senses are bombarded. The smells alone should be enough to drive a sane person to madness. The fact that they seemingly do not says more about the modern human mind than a psychology textbook ever could. Chicken, roast beef, mashed potatoes, zucchini, pizza, brownies, pasta, broccoli, and more paint the air with a miasma of olfactory graffiti that somehow, impossibly, fails to block out the body odor of the man standing in line ahead of me. He is engaged in a heated conversation with his wife about the cost of lawn mower blades while she digs through her purse for a gift card. Oxygen molecules throughout the room have bonded with grease molecules from the fryers, giving the air a warm and dense—yet tasty—quality. The predecessors of these molecules have drifted to the floor, coating it in a thin, slippery layer of ick.

I am standing inside the entrance of a buffet chain restaurant. A place for families to gather their young, their old, and all the generations in between, to sit, feast, clog their arteries, and pump more money into the economy than if they were eating at home. It is a place of variety, excess, and overpriced fountain drinks. More so than state fairs and fast food restaurants, this truly is the cardiovascular disease-prone Heart of America.

Through all of the buffet's sensory chaos, a single object reaches out and ensnares my attention though the clear acrylic casing of a claw machine in the corner. It is a teddy bear, and it is hideous. Its synthetic fur resembles a shade of neon green that has been killed in a boating accident. The face is squashed, as if pressed up against the backside of a larger and more dominant stuffed animal for too long in a dark shipping crate. One of the bear's wide, over-large eyes appears to have been glued on crooked at the factory, giving it a demented, cross-eyed expression. Its head tilts limply to the side at an angle which suggests the bear is drowsy, or possibly undead.

The bear is a spectacular failure on multiple levels. It fails as a stuffed animal. It fails at being a representation of an actual bear. It even fails to embody the *idea* of a bear or a stuffed animal. It is the most pathetic thing I have ever seen in my life. I would feel sorry for it if it wasn't so ugly and creepy.

Then I take notice of something beyond the bear itself: Its position within the claw machine. It sits atop a pile of other stuffed animals, just inches from the prize chute. I consider the implications. It is possible that a child might come along and, tempted by the easy win, take the bear home. It would be a terrible thing for this bear to fall into the hands a youngster, for no child should have to own a stuffed animal this ugly. It is also possible that the bear's sheer hideousness would deter the restaurant's patrons from using the claw machine, for fear that they might inadvertently knock the bear into the prize chute and be forced claim it themselves. The machine could sit idle for months, depriving the restaurant of income, and subsequently damaging the economy. My duty is clear: For the good of the world, I must extract this bear from the claw machine.

A dollar is required to play. This is a small financial sacrifice for so great a cause, and I make it willingly. Solemnly, I insert four quarters into the coin slot. The claw machine lights up, and I become aware that my entire life has been leading to this moment. I maneuver the claw into position and press the button. It descends three inches from the false bear and comes up empty. My depth perception has failed me. I silently curse my optometrist for only reminding me once that I was due for an eye exam sixteen months ago.

I must go beyond loose change now if I am to spare society from the ills that could be wrought by this meretricious mammal. From within the tattered, vinyl recesses of my wallet, I remove a folded one dollar bill that I had tucked away behind the photo of my Grandmother Josephine's beloved cat, Mr. Sniffles. I found this dollar on the floor beside his litter box one night when I visited Grandmother Josephine as a child. Mr. Sniffles had looked at the dollar bill on the floor, then at me, before hopping out of the litter box and leaving the room, as if to say, "Take this, kid. You'll need it someday." And now that day has come.

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