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Roy Orbison in Cling-film

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It always starts the same way. I am in the garden airing my terrapin Jetta when he walks past my gate, that mysterious man in black.

“Hello Roy,” I say. “What are you doing in Dusseldorf?”

“Attending to certain matters,” he replies.

“Ah,” I say.

He appraises Jetta’s lines with a keen eye. “That is a well-groomed terrapin,” he says.

“Her name is Jetta.” I say. “Perhaps you would like to come inside?”

“Very well.” He says.

Roy Orbison walks inside my house and sits down on my couch. We talk urbanely of various issues of the day. Presently I say, “Perhaps you would like to see my cling-film?”

“By all means.” I cannot see his eyes through his trademark dark glasses and I have no idea if he is merely being polite or if he genuinely has an interest in cling-film.

I bring it from the kitchen, all the rolls of it. “I have a surprising amount of cling-film,” I say with a nervous laugh. Roy merely nods.

“I estimate I must have nearly a kilometer in the kitchen alone.”

“As much as that?” He says in surprise. “So.”

“Mind you, people do not realize how much is on each roll. I bet that with a single roll alone I could wrap you up entirely.”

Roy Orbison sits impassively like a monochrome Buddha. My palms are sweaty.

“I will take that bet,” says Roy. “If you succeed I will give you tickets to my new concert. If you fail I will take Jetta, as a lesson to you not to speak boastfully.”

I nod. “So then. If you will please to stand.”

Roy stands. "Commence."

I start at the ankles and work up. I am like a spider binding him in my gossamer web. I do it tight with several layers. Soon Roy Orbison stands before me, completely wrapped in cling-film. The pleasure is unexampled.

"You are completely wrapped in cling-film," I say.

"You win the bet," says Roy, muffled. "Now unwrap me."

"Not for several hours."

"Ah."

I sit and admire my handiwork for a long time. So as not to make the ordeal unpleasant for him we make small talk on topical subjects, Roy somewhat muffled. At some point I must leave him to attend to Jetta's needs. When I return I find he has hopped out of my house, still wrapped in cling-film. The loss leaves me broken and pitiful. He never calls me. He sends no tickets. The police come and reprimand me. Jetta is taken away, although I get her back after a complicated legal process.

There is only one thing that can console me. A certain dream, a certain vision...

It always starts the same way.

In this fantasy I am driving along the Autobahn between Köln and Aachen. A large Winnebago has pulled to the side of the road ahead. An anxious-looking man flags me down.

“This could be trouble,” I say to Jetta. “It is certainly irregular.” Jetta says nothing. Little do I know what is in store.

“Can you help me,” says the man. “I am Roy Orbison’s tour manager.”

“Also?” I say in polite surprise. I have already read the legend “Roy Orbison tour bus” on the side of the vehicle.

I get out of the car. “What seems to be the problem?”

He leads me to the back of the van. “Roy has succumbed to a heart attack and is clinically dead,” he explains, indicating a certain well-known man in black sprawled on the floor of the vehicle.

“So,” I say.

“Are you perchance a doctor?”

“No. I studied at a catering college for some years but was forced to leave for reasons I prefer not to disclose.”

“Ach! Then I am at a loss what to do.”

“There is one thing we might try,” I say with elaborate nonchalance. “If we were to wrap him in cling-film, this would prevent corruption setting in until we can get him to a hospital.”

“It is certainly worth a try. But I have no cling-film.”

“Fortunately I have several rolls in the car.” I go to the car and retrieve it. The tour manager looks anxiously over my shoulder as I set to work. “I must work undisturbed,” I tell him. He nods and gives me privacy.

Now it is just me and Roy Orbison and the cling-film. I start from the ankles and work up to the trademark dark glasses, wrapping slowly and carefully. Soon Roy Orbison is completely wrapped in cling-film. He is like a big black beetle wrapped in a silvery cocoon. The satisfaction is unparalleled by anything in my previous existence.

“He is completely wrapped in cling-film,” I call to the manager. “I will

accompany him as you drive to the hospital.”

Four hours later Roy Orbison sits up in bed in hospital and smiles at me.

“I hear I owe you my life,” he says. “Please accept these concert tickets.”

I bow politely. “There is something you perhaps should know. While you were in a coma I was forced to wrap you entirely in cling-film.”

“Quick thinking,” says Roy.

“You did not mind?”

Roy’s expression is unreadable. “I wasn’t aware of it.” But was there the slightest twinkle behind those dark glasses?

Of course, I reflect as I return to the patient Jetta, there can be no question of him enjoying it, for he was dead at the time.

Or was he...???

It begins innocently enough in the pet-shop. I am seeking worms for Jetta. "Hello there," says a vaulting tenor voice behind me. "We meet again."

I turn and take in the black clothes and trademark dark glasses. I bow and smile. "Mr. Roy Orbison, I presume. What brings you to our little emporium?"

"I was passing through town on my way to a rock star conference in Essen when I decided to get some de-worming powder for my dog."

"Ah! How ironic! Your dog has worms and my Jetta eats worms." I decide to risk a little joke. "Perhaps we should bring the two of them together!" But Roy does not laugh. The eyes behind the dark shades express no mirth. "What? What are you saying? Are you saying your terrapin should eat worms out of my dog's ass?" he snarls.

It is all going wrong. My palms sweat. I wish to die. I try to wake up. I blush and mumble apologies. Fortunately just then a distraction arrives. Two criminals burst in waving shotguns.

"This is a robbery!" they yell. "You two are hostages."

"Make them tie each other up," says the lead robber.

"Ach! I have forgotten the rope," says his cohort.

"I happen to have a roll of cling-film with me," I offer diffidently. "Perhaps that would serve?"

"It will have to. Wrap that man in black in cling-film at once or it will go badly with you."

"Very well." Trembling, I take out the cling-film. "I am sorry Roy, it looks like I have no choice."

"Do what you have to."

I start at the feet and work my way up. I wrap him as tenderly as a mother swaddling an infant. I marvel at the play of light on the miraculous translucence. Soon, Roy Orbison is entirely wrapped in cling-film. I thank God that I was born to live this minute.

"He is completely wrapped up in cling-film," I report.

“Good,” says the bandit. “Now I want you to wrap the cling-film around the two of you so that you are wrapped up with him.”

My mouth dry, I stand pressed against Roy, who is wrapped completely in cling-film. Awkwardly, I pass the film around both of our waists several times, until we are bound together by the miracle substance. My synapses overload with joy.

“We are both wrapped in cling-film,” I tell the robbers. “I am not completely wrapped, however, but is there more cling-film in my briefcase if you would care to finish the job.”

“No, that will do.”

It certainly will!

It is an hour or more before the police come to release us.

“Well,” I say to Roy Orbison, “it was nice to meet you again.”

“I’m not a philosophical man,” says Roy thoughtfully, “but it seems like we are bound together in some way.”

“Yes — by cling-film!” I say.

This time Roy does laugh.

This time I am at the health-spa having my cuticles attended to and procuring a pedicure for Jetta.

“Also,” says the garrulous beautician as she works. “You will never guess. We are favored by a visit from celebrity today.”

“Unglaublich,” I say without much interest. “Some dreary town councilor or rising star of the banking industry, no doubt,” I say with a wink at Jetta.

“No, no,” says the busybody as she plies her trade, “This is a big American rock star who wears iconic black clothing and trademark dark glasses. His name is Roy ... Orbital? Orbheissen? Rasmussen? Something of that nature.”

It takes a second or two for the penny to drop. “Black clothes and dark glasses you say. I implore you to think carefully. Could the man’s name conceivably be Roy Orbison? This is a matter of extreme urgency to me.”

“Yes! That was it exactly! Fancy, he is in the next room waiting for me to give him a seaweed wrap.”

I rise from the chair. “I find I have to go out for a moment. You will please remain here and attend to Jetta. I have decided you will give her a shell-wax. I will be locking the door after I leave to ensure your compliance.”

“So.”

“So.”

I adjourn smartly to the next cubicle. Roy Orbison is lying on a massage table naked save for a strategically placed towel. Some soothing unguent has been applied to his face and slices of cucumber have been placed over his trademark dark glasses.

“Good day,” I say. “Are you relaxed?”

“I am highly relaxed but expect to be more so following my seaweed wrap,” says Roy.

“Regrettably I find we have run out of seaweed following a maritime disaster in which various contaminants were released destroying the world supply of sargasso for generations to come,” I say smoothly. “Instead I urge you to try our new cling-film wrap. The health-giving properties of this miracle

substance cannot be overstated.”

“Cling-film?” Roy cannot see me but tries to peer round the cucumber slices occluding his glasses. “Don’t I know your voice?”

“I am an eminent doctor and am to be trusted implicitly.”

“Ah,” says Roy. “Then you may commence.”

“Speaking as a doctor, that is a wise decision.”

I start from the feet and work my way up. It is strange for him to be naked as I wrap him but I suppose it would be too suspicious were I to ask him to put his trademark black clothes back on. I am like an Egyptian priest enshrouding his Pharaoh. Soon, Roy Orbison is wrapped up in Cling-film. I let out a soft mew of contentment and mutely acknowledge that all things work for the best in this world.

“You are completely wrapped in cling-film,” I tell him. “To get the full benefits you must remain so for several hours or until someone comes and finds us. To keep you company I will stay in the room and breathe heavily.”

“That is kind of you.”

There follows several hours of almost unbearable bliss. Presently a masseuse comes and looks at us quizzically.

“We are closing now. Have you seen Frieda?”

“Yes, I locked her in the room next door.”

“Ah. Why is that man in cling-film?”

“Medical reasons.”

“So.”

I permit the woman to unwrap Roy as it is not in my nature to do so.

“You know,” I say, “If you were to remain wrapped in cling-film forever I estimate it could extend your lifespan by a thousand years.”

“I will bear that in mind,” says Roy.

And it wouldn’t do my health any harm either, I almost add!

—excerpted from *Ulrich Haarbürste’s Novel of Roy Orbison in Clingfilm*