

# The Day No One Laughed

- A  
Short Story

## Act 1

Life gave no advance warning. Unlike TV Guide; not like Show Time; not HBO like. Not like any of television's long running programs. The establishment of a theme, done the same day and time, weekly, monthly, year end and year out; providing the viewer time to prepare for the expected and predicted, the unexpected and surprising, conquests, grief, sorrow. The birds remained calm, charting undisturbed paths, fluttering from branch-to-branch, line-to-line, not telling, not revealing. Darwin's greatest creature – the cockroach - remained sequestered in the trunk of the century four floors down, maintaining their routine, stealing away until the dark of night. By contrast, the last storm off the

Pacific, they told a different tale, knowing, moving up the wall to the roof, a herd of them; if cockroaches in the thousands could be considered a herd. Not on this day, nothing out of the ordinary occurred. No pre-telling, nary a hint, no deviation from life's familiar pattern.

The morning was like most for Jamaal Wedgeable's mornings when on the road. Starting in the lobby of the hotel, collecting the local paper, grabbing a seat off to the side, watching people as they come and go. Checking his nails for the thirty-fifth time (the passage of time had little or no effect of his vanity), admiring the shine on his shoes. Such was his habit, somewhat akin to a nervous tick, only his ticks were embedded, on hand, on his feet. Reading, but not, watching, pretending he wasn't.

Visiting the hotel in the past – five – six – times, requesting the same room, receiving a wake-up call at the same time,

sitting in the same chair each time. The eleventh city in twenty days, obscured, sequestered in his customary observation post - for exactly fifty-five minutes – popping upward, as if hearing a timer, folding the paper, moving to a small restaurant lying due west, fifty-feet away from his observation post.

Always an early riser, in the lobby no later than six/sixty-thirty, before retreating to the restaurant, no matter the city, predictable as the sun's tracking east then west. Predictable as the sparrow-hawk sequestered outside the window, screaming, scanning, searching for prey; predictable as his opening a second, third, fourth box of cereal, reading the sides of the box - as if the ingredients had changed since the last time he check- folding each box in-half before handing them off - chanting - "Coo-coo for Cocoa Puffs, coo-coo for Cocoa Puffs, coo-coo for Cocoa Puffs." Coo-coo for Cocoa Puffs he was, convinced Cocoa Puffs were

bequeathed by the gods, never admitting or sharing this belief with others; never incorporating this oddity into his routine. He was unsure whether any book of faith labeled his obsession a sin. Coveted he did. Slurping, wiping, chuckling, the chuckle a self-contained narcissism, an appreciative chuckle to his genius. He was self-contained, as always, needing no one else's affirmation of his brilliance as an observer of life, as a comic. Life's predictability played out around him as he read.

The morning clerk – Raul – too was coo-coo for Cocoa Puffs. Clocking in, walking over to the breakfast bar, returning within two minutes, bringing back with him a large of Cocoa-Puffs. Taking an early morning break, twenty-five minutes into the shift – secreted behind the wall to pull and stroke, out of sight of the security camera, the customers mingling in the lobby. His was a morning ritual – done at six thirty-three every day - accompanied with a low,

distorted, chant, “Coo-coo for Cocoa Puffs, coo-coo for Cocoa Puffs.”

Unbeknownst to Raul, Sylvia’s station permitted her access – watching every morning – sitting above and away, at angle Raul hadn’t considered, remaining quiet, permitting her to know him better than most, appreciating of his consistency. Raul’s behavior was both persistent and ritualistic; much like the clock sitting on Sylvia’s desk, keeping rhythm, measuring time. Too far away to hear, interpreting instead, knowing over time he was repeating himself, not knowing whether he was mimicking the pigeons who cooed outside her window, nestled high, cooing daily. If Sylvia had been closer, Raul’s mouthing would have not been foreign to her. She was familiar with the cereal in her native Mexico. She just wasn’t close enough. Seeing coo-coo fall from the edge of his lips, spending less time assessing what he was saying.

Wedgeable always sat alone. Consuming, collecting his thoughts, discarding old jokes, inserting new material, at times allowing an audible laugh to escape, most times not, cooing over and over again, before replenishing the bowl, the way a farmer replenishes a hog’s trough. Scanning the newspapers for topical events, checking his phone for the mundane, responding to other’s posts, texting his agent, all done in sequence, the same sequence he undertook the morning before and the morning before that, as he has done over the last thirty years. A working comic, struggling to remain relevant, wanting to continue to have his say, forever crafting his art, observant of life’s predictability and unpredictability; knowing nothing of Raul’s whacking, Sylvia’s observing, he secreted no more than seventy-feet away, the other seventy-five feet, situated above, watching.

Always adapting, a reader, an observant of his surroundings, all to perfect

his craft was Wedgeable's habits. Practicing his craft while working against time; time gifting him with the perceptible slowing of his pace, the restructuring of his chest wall, a pronounced curvature in the shoulders, the retexturing of his hair. The most disturbing of the physical changes for him was changes taking place with his hair - taking some, gifting some; hair now occupying places and spaces previously unoccupied; others spots showing no signs of previous occupation.

Wedgeable dyed his hair for five years, pretending he had not. He wore it long for a period of time, extensions in place, pulling and tugging, he unwittingly aiding Father Time's persistent assault, balding him further. None of these life changes appeared in his routine, even though the extensions were a different texture and color from the remaining strands which help to anchor the extensions. No one ever mentioned the bold comic not

being so bold anymore, refusing to comment on the obvious.

Wedgeable's closest friends breathed sighs of relief when he finally decided to shave his head; revealing a birth-mark, occupying the middle of his skull, shaped like the state of Florida, pointing backward, downward, curving slightly to the right, terminating no more than an inch from the abandoned hairline. When directly under the sun, the image glistens, as if powered by the next best idea in lighting; this physical trait did find its way into Wedgeable's routine. A fellow passenger noticed the birth-mark when Wedgeable turned his head toward the flight attendant. She, his fellow passenger, smiled when he turned back in her direction. She asked to touch his scalp, before extending a compliment. "Your birthmark was incredibly sexual."

Generations younger, blessed with a brilliant smile, she quickly extended the compliment then just as fast turned away,

curling in a semi-circle, somewhat akin to a centipede, occupying the small crevice between the seat and the wall, falling fast asleep for the remainder of the flight. Maybe it was how she said it. Maybe it was because she said it. Her words worked as a catalyst. Wedgeable worked the entire two-hour flight, incorporating new material, never recognizing his acceptance was borne in part out of the power of observation, a stranger's observation, seeing an ego needing stroking, stroking only so much, stepping back, moving out of the way.

Wedgeable didn't have to appear at the theatre until three, for sound check. The walk-through, with the Crew Chief, was at four. The show was not scheduled to start until seven thirty. The crew chief, Mike Phillips, was a fan, having followed Jamaal's career for the last twenty years, since Jamaal's his first appearance in Portland. He views Wedgeable differently – you know – different, as in “not like most

black comics”. He didn't know why he considered him different, he just did. He worked Wedgeable's show the last time he was in Portland. Never one for words he never tried to expand on why he liked Wedgeable. When asked he repeated the same words. The most expansive explanation he ever provided was when he learned Wedgeable appeared on this year's list of performers telling his wife, Mary, “That son-bitch is funny, not like most black comics.”

Mike is actually a junior, a Portlander, born and raised. Initially his family lived in the city limits, later moving to the outskirts of the city. Mike Senior said they moved to be closer to his job at Boeing. When it was pointed out the old address was closer to the job, he changed his story to “better schools.” Senior is union man, working for Boeing in Seattle prior to transferring to the Portland facility, transferring prior to Junior's birth, even

though his wife, Mariam, protested, she not wanting to move to another state and change doctors in her last trimester. Senior is now nearing retirement, time taking nothing from his major trait – the art of complaining - an opinionated sort, having an opinion for most things, willing to express his opinions, even if not asked. He still complained that Boeing was forced to move its corporate headquarters out of the Northwest because everyone spent more time paying attention to the computer and coffee boys, “spending too much time being weird” were his words.” This complaint exists even though decades have now passed since the move. In the same conversation he always worked in his own union, saying they didn’t give enough concessions, mattered not he was part of the leadership; and retained his employment.

Senior is the person who updates his computer religiously, even though the updates are unnecessary, rationalizing, “got

to support the economy”. All while refusing to support the U.S. based workers’ attempt to unionize, applauding the computer company sending the work overseas. He bragged that he possessed an honorary membership card from Stumptown, the Coffee House, even though Stumptown didn’t give out membership cards. When watching television one day, Senior found himself screaming at the television commentator’s assessment of the need to unionize service workers; seeing Stumptown as being threatened, declaring in the same breath, “Their coffee is a gift from the gods”. Forever, a supporter of the grunge music scene, able to track groups back three decades, identifying members who have gone and come, able to discuss the influences contributing to a group’s sound, readily criticizing those groups who “have strayed from their roots.” Senior never saw the contradictions his behavior provided to others, it mattered not, his job provided him

good benefits, spending little or no time worry about others views, expecting doubt to disappear if he applied a little bit of bullying to the discussion. When his union brethren wanted to cast a vote in support of Stumptown's labor force's attempt to unionize, he tabled the discussion, even though the vote was legally noticed and encouraged by the district office. He liked Stumptown and that seemed enough for him, unionized or not. "The lessons I learned as a union foreman are the same lessons I apply to life," – whatever that means - he said it - two days after having a discussion with Junior about "that black comic", a week before Wedgeable's appearance, said while working into the conversation his main point, his belief Junior's union, I.A.T.S.E, International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, was not a real union. "Stage workers", "negro comics", "do y'all handle the wardrobe changes also." He never heard Junior's response, "if we have too", nor did

he see the thoughts floating above his head, contained in a bubble, "the show must go on, the show must go on."

By the time Mike made his way to the Theatre, Wedgeable was just finishing his nap. Not really a nap – nap - a thinking nap. Turning, turning, turning, nodding, not really sleeping, in ten, fifteen minutes increments before bolting from the bed to scribble in an indescribable text. Running to the rest room, examining all angles in the mirror, practicing facial expressions, unconsciously running his hand over his shaven scalp, not realizing that he no longer needed to shave the entire scalp daily, possessing only a small patch in the rear dip - near the top of the neck – where a few prominent strands of hair remaining.

The last girlfriend commented he was looking "a little Genghis Khan about the head." Wedgeable looked up Genghis Khan on his computer, he never found an image allowing him to fully determine what

Sylvia meant. Sylvia didn't bother to refer to a computer, touching the singular strands of hair extending from the bottom of his skull, hinting he needed to shave the pitiful clump of hair which refused to succumb to Mother Nature. Her words weren't intended to be a compliment. Sylvia's other parting words, "I have to get some sleep. You are not good for a woman's health". Wedgeable understood, having heard the same words before from others. Not needing to look up the meaning of her words, a familiar complaint about his daily, nightly routine.

A routine repeated before and after shows, interrupting sleep at two in the morning, repeating, obsessing; never moving off the stage, out of the limelight. Coupling together, close to an impossibility; three hours of sleep over an ten-hour period, telling jokes he told on stage hours earlier, providing a graphic description of the audience's reaction, watching for her reaction, falling asleep, then talking in his

sleep, grunting, spitting, consuming more tea, before moving to the restroom for the fifth, sixth, seventh time during the night, talking out loud, not to himself, but to a third person hovering somewhere over his right shoulder, possessing his psyche, while he perfected his art.

She told him she loved him when she left. She thinks she did. He thinks she did. She did – love him. It was all exciting at first, before it started to wear on her. Now refusing to take his calls, unwilling to forfeit her sleep to hear another story, shaking uncontrollably at the sight of seeing him talk to the mythical figure hovering over his shoulder, refusing to watch comics, repulsed by comedies, finding little humor in life, attempting to recover, to rehab - wanting to be herself again. The therapist struggled to define her condition, knowing Sylvia had not seen Jamaal for a year, "she has made little progress", read her notes. "A persistent, worrisome itch remains. Her



sleep pattern remains disturbed. She is a woman devoid of any sense of humor, appreciation for life.” The therapist told Sylvia the word “for the irrational fear of clowns is coulrophobia”. Her research had yet to provide her a word to describe the fear of comics, rational or irrational. Sylvia did not need a term to describe her feelings. The therapist did, never having seen such madness.

Sipping a bit of Echinacea tea, clearing his throat, covering his head, convinced of the tea’s curative qualities, even though the studies said otherwise, tossing, turning, part-sleep, part-consciousness, practicing his routine for the thousandth time, hearing the roars of laughter, seeing faces from past lives in the audience, smiling, nodding, acknowledging before continuing, grunting, curling in a ball, with knees tucked underneath, hand clasped, as if he was a praying mantis, before clearing his throat again. Wedgeable

read the studies – about Echinacea – didn’t believe a word written, proclaiming “blasphemy”, “heresy”, never reading the entire report. Making sure he always had an ample supply, moving back to the edge of the bed, grabbing the glass, taking another gulp for good measure before dosing off for another thirty minutes, at most, throwing the pillows from the bed, standing erect, emitting a scream, somewhat akin to Tarzan’s scream. Removing the covers from the bed, tossing them in the corner of the room, bending, thanking an invisible audience, “Thank you ... thank you ... thank you!” The sound was now more akin to his father’s rooster when declaring his territory, screaming, stretching, bowing; thanking the – well - his audience. Words occupying every inch of the room, invading into the next; bowing in all directions, towards the window, the western wall, the eastern wall; pivoting, turning rapidly towards the shower, appearing to be electrically charged.

Conduct which represented nothing out the ordinary; rather his was the familiar, the routine; no foreboding, no foretelling, no displaced itching.

A car awaited in the hotel's bay, per the contract, as Wedgeable showered. Idling, carrying the same driver who drove Wedgeable when he last visited, two years before. The driver's presence was not in the contract. Wedgeable requested her presence. A month's worth of the local newspapers sat in the backseat, contrasting against the black leather, awaiting the comic's consumption, on the trip over, prior to the show. The newspapers are in the contract, the same as the Echinacea Teas sitting in the limo's refrigerator, even though Wedgeable always carried his own. "Just in case they forget," forever obsessing was his lot. Every time he made this statement Sylvia involuntarily itched, even though she was a thousand miles away, and hadn't seen Jamaal for a year. "A persistent,

worrisome itch", are the words which appear in the therapist's records, page 2031.

## Act 2

“Good evening.”

“Good evening, Mr. Wedgeable.  
Welcome back to Portland.”

Wedgeable entered the limo on the right side (always the right side), giving his jacket to the driver (always with his left hand, never his right), nudging the awaiting newspapers, checking the shine on his shoes (always, always), looking at his reflecting in the window (forever vain), then the face of his watch, settling into the seat, feeling good about life, about himself. Anticipating the audience, playing the show’s progression out in his mind – opening, two minutes before transitioning - taking breath, working even though it didn’t appear he was working. Nothing unusual about the behavior, the same behavior he demonstrated prior to the last show, the show before that, the show before that.

The driver moved around the rear of the car, wiping a misplaced fingerprint,

walking and examining at the same time, before opening the rear left door, placing the jacket on a hanger. After entering and settling into her seat, she adjusted the outside mirrors, repositioned an intricately detailed black wool hat, wiped the dashboard for dust (even though there was no dust), cleaned the rear view mirror (even though it sparkled before she touched it), before directing her eyes upward.

“Do you want your privacy, Mr. Wedgeable? I can raise the partition, if you desire?”

“No, no, no, you can leave it down.”

“Have you enjoyed your stay so far?”

“I got in late last night, I haven’t really had a chance to get out and visit the city.”

“I heard there was a mix-up on the limo last night. I want to apologize for the mix-up. I hope the substitute driver met your needs.”

“Not a problem. Not a problem.”

“Looking forward to a good show?”

“Hope so ... Been working on some new materials. I hope so.”

The sun followed as the car pulled onto the roadway, merging into traffic. The sun’s rays reflected off Wedgeable’s watch; moved downward, without permission, invading and touching all – seat ... papers ... floor. The sun’s movement reminded Wedgeable that he still had work, drawing his attention to the papers. The driver saw Wedgeable look down, reach for the newspapers. She reached, raising the partition, tapped the screen, selecting Ray Charles and Nora Jones’ versions of “Here We Go Again.”

“Here we go again, the phone will ring again. I’ll be her fool again, one more time.”

Reading, consuming, preparing as he had done thousands of times before; here we go again; allowing the predictable again,

permitting his nervousness to drive the humor, one more time.

The selection of the driver was driven by his gut, his intuition. Something about her reminded, even though he has never bothered to know her full name, remembering only Ginger. Her full name is Ginger Zambroski.

\* \* \*

“You are going to think I’m crazy”, Ginger said; pausing a bit, before continuing, answering her own statement.

“I’m crazy, I get a check.”

Ginger owned both the question and answer. Part of a conversation she had with one of her best friends, Zoie. She and Zoie did meth together, sitting days on end, playing with their phones, listening to music, blending her obsessive compulsive tendencies with meth induced illusions.

“I became a fan years ago, seeing him on HBO. Funny, funny, shit!”

She never explained what “funny, funny shit meant”, even though truth be known, she said it at least twenty-times, playing with her phone, laughing, counting the flowers on the wall, then trying a new screen pattern. Wedgeable’s jokes shared the high, unseen and unheard by Zoie. “Funny, funny shit,” she repeated. Zoie never asked what she meant, nor did she give any indication she heard what Ginger said, disagreeing instead with Ginger’s count, “I counted nine hundred and thirty seven flowers.” The meth high played out in Ginger’s head, while she made seemingly contradictory promises; not to do meth again; to get with Zoie again as soon as possible, “fun shit”, were the words which followed the second promise.

\* \* \*

Glancing in the rear view mirror, watching Wedgeable laugh to himself, appearing to nibble on his fingers, throwing his head back, consumed in thought. Ginger

was sixty-three days from her confinement in the Multnomah County Jail, one-hundred and ninety-three days from her third overdose, three-hundred and sixty-five days from attending Wedgeable’s redemption concert, his agreeing to come back to Portland, her still thinking “funny, funny, shit”, when entering the arena.

“We are nearing your location Mr. Wedgeable. Do you have any special requests?”

“I believe the walk-through will take a couple of hours. I intend to get a bite to eat next door prior to the show. I will be okay.”

“I’m paid to stay put until the show is over. I will park on the western side of the complex. When the show ends I will pick you up at the same place I dropped you off.”

“You need not wait around. I anticipate the show ending at 11:00. I should be out around 11:45 p.m. If you are

back around 11:15, I okay with you leaving, and coming back later.”

“Yes sir.”

The instructions were to stay at the site. To always be available. Meth instructed Ginger otherwise, pulling against her better judgment, pulling stronger than her pull on the wheel as she entered the bay. Stepping out of the vehicle, opening Wedgeable’s door, twitching, seeing her future, at least for the next four hours – clear as the blue sky illuminating, as if the sun shorn upward instead of downward, showing the path, a future, as clear as the needle pricks located on her right arm.

“Mr. Wedgeable.”

“Thank you.”

The walk-through was uneventful. Mike-check, lighting-check, instructions from Wedgeable, requests from the house - video selection, cues, music - discussion of new materials. Nothing unusual, professionally run, in-out, done. Well,

nothing unusual, except the spotlight operator shattered his ankle and broke his foot, falling from his perch, twenty-feet above, falling onto the stage as the Wedgeable and the Crew Chief moved off-stage. His injuries caused by his not deciding fast enough, whether to go head first, hands first, failing to adjust his position in mid-fall, not deciding, somersaulting onto the stage, ankle first, a weird angle, then the foot, dangling foot. He looked like a spinning top coming to an abrupt stop, ankle, foot, leg, body twisting, toppling over. Not at all gentle! That paramedic man taped his foot to the board so as not to lose it.

Nothing else unusual happened.



... Went to the Emergency Room ... nothing  
else happened.

## Act 3

“Welcome Ladies and Gentlemen  
...”

The announcer moved to center stage under a fixed spot, his ponytail trailing, casting a shadow - a stationary shadow - the same as the spot. The audience didn't know why he moved onto the stage in total darkness, walking under the light. The crew and management did. I.A.T.S.E.'s contract requires the substitute operator be paid double-time for each hour worked, particularly if the crew member is working outside of his or her craft, if the crew member is substituted in for another member, added to the shift without sufficient notice, required to travel more than twenty miles from ones' home base. The House Manager, Maureen McGinty, was aware of the contract provisions. She had no intentions of honoring them. No sooner than the EMS placed the worker in the ambulance, Maureen made her intentions

clear. The lawyers explained to Maureen the applicable provisions. She knew the contract like the back of her hand, didn't need her lawyer explaining the contract's meaning, and could care less he knew the particular provision - she needed him to have her back and get out of the way.

“I told your representative when we negotiated this contract that I wasn't going to honor that particular provision. I meant it then and my position hasn't changed. We are a small house. The language is stock language. It applies to large houses, houses located in New York, Los Angeles. I'm not paying a substitute operator double-time.”

“You're going to need someone to operate the lights,” was Mike's response. Having worked with Maureen for the last ten years, and two contracts, he understood his were hollow words. She wasn't bulging.

“I'm not paying double-time, figure out another solution. It's a damn light.



Turn it on, point it and follow, simple. Put someone else up there.”

“Without training that’s a dangerous job. You’re asking us to put a person working out- of-craft. This being a Saturday night, all of the other qualified operators have been called out. We can get someone here from Seattle. I may be able to get someone in from Vancouver. The house will be responsible for transportation costs, and double-time. Maureen, you do know what doing is in violation of the contract. We intend to file a complaint with the NLRB.”

“File it, I don’t care. All I know I need a spot.”

“None of my crew is going to scale the rigging until OSHA has had an opportunity of investigating the accident. I have a man on his way to the hospital. We will comply with the contract. He will be drug tested and a third-party will investigate, not you, not us, but a third-party.” Mike

Junior’s words were stated firmly, supervisor firmly. Maureen heard him, heard every word, moved away as if propelled, violently putting in place each foot, stomping, as she took each step; her cheeks grew crimson, as if a make-up crew was following, applying blush. This was her house. Moving across the stage, seeing images of the contract in her vision, and for extra-effect throwing the program into the air, as if she too was a theatre major (she was). “The show must go on!” And it did; fixed-spot and all.

“Ladies and Gentleman, he has been labeled a comic genius, one of America’s most influential voices. Help me welcome Jamaal Wedgeable back to Portland. Let me hear you! Let me hear you! Let me hear you! ... J-a-m-a-a-l W-e-d-g-e-a-b-l-e!! ... J-a-m-a-a-l W-e-d-g-e-a-b-l-e!!! ... J-a-m-a-a-l W-e-d-g-e-a-b-l-e!!!! ...”

Out of the spot, into the spot, one body substituting for the other. Some

admired - mouthing, “old school, good touch”; others, “different touch”; a few shouted “bravo”, followed by “weird”, thinking the arrangement was a Portland thing, while it was nothing more than a compromise. No double-time, a crew member climbed the rigging, locked the spot in place and descended. The show must go on, and it did.

“Hello Portland! ... Hello, Portland! ... Hello, Portland!” Each hello delivered with greater emphasis, pulling the crowd out of their chairs, emitting screams of excitement, sharing their love. “A singular female voice separated from the rest, emitted a distinctive shout, “We love you!”

“Love you back! Love you back!”

Applause filled the theatre, the audience settled in their seat, Wedgeable moved out of the spot disappearing, forgetting the technical difficulty restrictions he was working under. Nervousness, maybe; the mistake was more likely because

he was deviating from his normal practice, moving, prowling the stage, looking upward, outward; working the entire crowd. Don’t know why he didn’t just move, he just didn’t.

Then it happened.

“Can’t see your black ass”! – spoken as if the person was given a microphone. Tone, tenor, voice reflection indicated the voice of a White male, emanating from Row Q, Seat 21, hidden by darkness. His name doesn’t matter. It was on! - causing Jamaal to deviate from his routine, bringing forth the reason he became a comic in the first place. Insulting him, challenging him, reminding him of his rural Texas roots; causing the hair on his neck to bristle, standing on end, hearing that inner-voice flat-out scream ... *Naw ... he didn’t go there; naw, naw, naw ... He didn’t!*

But he did!

Jamaal followed him and went there. “On my way over to the theatre, I read at

least a month of newspapers. In reading, I read that Oregon was formed as the white man's utopia. Granted statehood in 1859, the only state in the Union admitted with a constitution that forbade black people from living, working, or owning property in the state. Hell, it was illegal for black people even to move to this State until 1926. That's what I read."

Another lone voice, a resonance sounded black, shouted, "Yeah!" Blurted out as if he was three drinks ahead of the crowd; screaming for screaming sake, a misplaced, "yeah," blurted out at the wrong time, wrong place. Whether he was agreeing with Wedgeable, agreeing with the law, no one ever figured that out. His was an ambiguous, drunken, "yeah". He was the only other black man in the audience of five hundred Portlanders, now feeling as separated as history intended him to be.

Wedgeable ever attuned responded, "Hope you're not celebrating brother. Hope

you're not celebrating." He was still out of the spot, now unsure how to get back, back to his routine, back into the spot. Why he didn't just take a few steps and move back. No one ever said. Instead, his statement worked to silence a lone voice he may have needed later in his routine. He – the minority of one – if you don't count Jamaal – moved lower in his seat, suffering the same embarrassment he suffered in the third grade when Mrs. Robinson screamed at him, telling him to "shut up!"

Wedgeable hadn't envisioned any of these events in his dreams. Maybe it was a dream, he thought. The same voice who told him that he couldn't see his black ass, reminded him it was not – not a dream.

"Can't see you ..."

Stated cutely this time; fifteen-year old Eddie Haskell cute, not David Duke cute. He –Alexander - is that person we all know, not willing to be quiet, always demanding attention, secretly desiring the

stage. Unbeknownst to Alexander, his words quieted his date. She ducked her head, moving lower in her seat, pretending she was not with him. Turning her body in the other direction, practicing the speech to be given later in the evening, “I don’t want to ever see you again; don’t ever call me again.”

Alexander was no longer fifteen, but twenty-five, a recent theatre graduate at the University of Oregon. His words didn’t come off as cute, having the opposite effect, picking at Wedgeable’s scabs, causing blood to flow, revealing a long-lingering infection, freezing Wedgeable in place, erasing the thin-line between comedy and hate, humor and reality; a dream it was not. The same words caused Alexander’s green eye, cream-colored date to see the black skin of her mother. Alexander didn’t know any of this – her words, thoughts, race – all invisible to him. Remember, he had never grown out of his Eddie Haskell skin.

“Maybe that’s my point, wasn’t meant for you to see my black ass!” Wedgeable said. Yes he did it. Yes he did. Continuing to go there, deviating, travelling the road less travelled, lost. GPS wasn’t saving his ass now, just wasn’t. The audience was frozen, not knowing whether to laugh or what (there is no better way of explaining this, “or what”); totally silenced, checking tickets, programs, collectively lowering their heads, signaling a group resignation, somewhat akin to a reverse wave, finding none of the exchange funny.

Standing in the dark, isolated, refusing to move, incapable of moving, only five minutes into his routine, frozen. Staring at the lonesome spot lying ten feet away, wrapping his arms around his body, left arm one direction, right arm the other, needing a human’s touch, seeking to recover. Seeing the heat rise from the stage, a single camera flash (Row Q, Seat 21, no other flash, no

other pictures taken), assured who was taking the picture.

Wedgeable attempt to recover was an act of futility. He needed another's touch. He and Raul met at least twice, each thanking each other, answering politely, wishing each other a good day. Raul could have told him there was no substitute for the touch of another, sitting shocked eighty-nine days later, Sylvia holding onto his right hand, the same hand he used to pull and stroke, telling him what she witnessed every day, refusing to let go, feeling the contours of his hand, extending him a proposal. Wedgeable however was living in the present, not the future. The same isolation that was Ginger's, overdosing; engine running, parked on the other side of town. Ginger's life was saved by Zoie, anticipating the worst when Ginger told her she didn't stay in place, that she didn't want to see the show, knowing she loved Wedgeable's work, "funny, funny shit."

So, so, so ... he stayed in place – out on an island - seeking to control his anger, failing at controlling his tears, isolated in a sea of quieted strangers, admirers and Portlanders, not knowing whether the laugh or cry. He was now twenty minutes into his routine, nary a laugh.

"He hasn't moved", stated the Back Stage Manager. "He hasn't moved." Mike didn't wait for the obvious. By this time he made it back stage, and was scaling the rigging, reaching for the spot, redirecting the light, working out of his craft, attempting to save Wedgeable. It was too late, not because he was too late, but because at the same time he was pulling and tugging, another voice rang out from the audience, screaming at the top of his voice, making sure everyone heard him. "That's why nigger. That's why the law was passed. Your ass ain't at all funny!"

No one ever discovered what section and seat the voice came from. It didn't

matter. Mike Junior recognized his father's voice, shocked by the words, losing his grip, over-shooting Wedgeable – by ten feet – correcting the spot, landing the spot directly into Wedgeable's eyes, catching tears streaming down Wedgeable's face, facial feature contorted, his anger rising as fast and hot as the heat generated by the spot. Standing in place, violating all the rules of public speaking, failing to roll with the punches, violating the universal rules of comics – losing control of the environment, allowing the bully to win, failing to conquer the bully with wit, something he had done all his life. Instead of looking at the play from above, he was now a failed character in the play, captured.

The lone black voice heard earlier removed the clip holding his dreads, covering his face, sinking lower in the seat, feigning sleep through the remaining minutes, still angry for Jamaal for embarrassing him, calling him out. "I didn't

do anything. I was agreeing." The audience had now thinned to three hundred and fifty, all the seats near the exits emptied first. Hush was dominant sound. Not a soul laughed.

Jamaal Wedgeable last words were in response to Mike Senior, while exiting. "Maybe you're right. Maybe you're right." Wiping his tears, at the same time Mike Junior wiped his, the spot tailed, following, two steps behind. Twenty-three minutes, forty-five seconds into the show, Jamaal Wedgeable exited the theatre, into the parking lot. A single light shorn overhead, providing enough light for his steps and thoughts. Walking away from his worst performance ever, well, save the time he bombed in a routine in his fifth grade math class. Gathering his thoughts, thinking of turning around, refusing to turn around; hearing the words of his father, "Your temper is going to be the death of you", laughing to himself; laughing because he

rediscovered the wonders of laughter, even when life's challenges seemed to be winning. Trying to remember the insurance man's name, remembering his name, but not his number; knowing, just knowing, he was going to be sued. The costs of the refunds, reputation lost, the bad press caused him to quicken his pace as he moved down the street. Examining every building, store, person he passed, looking for new materials; wondering how he could use his failure in his next act. Promising to himself to never ever travel to the northwest again; shouting at the top of his lungs ("Fuck them. "Fuck me."); emitting a hearty laugh; a reassuring chant ("Coo-coo for Cocoa Puff, coo-coo for Cocoa Puff, coo-coo for Cocoa Puffs"). Yes, indeed, recognizing he would indeed survive this also.