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Dwarf Doom is Here Again

Roger Lasley
University of Northern Iowa

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Dick, Jane and Spot in . . .

Dwarf Doom is Here Again

by Roger Lasley

"It's like a little fairy who, setting down a tiny hurdle, succeeds in leaping it. His friends all about, applaud, calling for more volunteers like this."

The Coroner Dwarf: A Pause (Not Applause)

The coroner dwarf hesitated before leaping as he had proposed. A concrete slab of such dimensions as his autopsy table (or Rollaway, as he often called it—with a self-assured though sleepy glance its way) looked a wee bit large for a hurdle, to be sure; but then, the coroner dwarf disdained anything large, and in respect to Rollaway it was a familiar disdain. He disdained it knowingly, for the world to see—or at least the small audience of townfolk who awaited his leap breathlessly.

The coroner dwarf was of a mind to prolong this breathlessness—definitely. He looked entirely businesslike, a small businesslike statue, concretely crouched.

To the audience it seemed that, long as their wait was becoming, there was still no time to catch one's breath. The hustle and bustle with which the coroner dwarf has proposed to entertain them, seemed forever in the making, but a long time in coming. And the result of all this waiting was that the audience—the *audience*, mind you!—was that the audience should be out of breath?! WHAT KIND OF TABLES HAVE BEEN TURNED, HERE?

The audience, breathless, and quite out of sorts, looked beseechingly heavenwards, ready to interpret any sign.

"If you can read this, you aren't trying hard enough!" admonished one such taped to the ceiling above Rollaway.

"The Expensive Margin!" Yells Writer Dwarf

To the writer dwarf, the graph paper represented a bad case of writer's block. He picked up a sheet, glanced around the store and then back down to the—whoops!—already grubby paper.

Holding the sheet off to one side and using a finger as his teacher's staff, the writer dwarf pointed as he thought. "At first the margins were way over on the left and right hand sides, the writer was confident, his works were going to spill off the page if he didn't watch it. Then it occurred to him that he should perhaps move the margins in a bit, be a little discreet for a change. Discreet?! He knew the meaning of that word; yessir, he sure could feel sure of himself around words like that. Give him more words like *that* and he could stay up half the night (Half the night?—three quarters! Maybe even the whole night long!) drawing these here lines. And no more than a whoop and a holler apart."

To the writer dwarf, this paper seemed very expensive.

Dwarf Doom Is Here Again

Dick is talking like father:

"Dwarfs can get in ruts, too. They have to almost stand on each others' shoulders to get out of them. It's at such times that a dwarf will really break out in a sweat. You can sense his fear."

Dick empties a glass of water over his head so Jane and Spot can see how easy it would be to sense a dwarf's fear—after all, his shirt is soaked!

"Time and time again a dwarf is lent a helping hand. His life must look much like a pathway cleared through a mass of people graced with right and left helping hands—at least from his perspective. From ours, it just looks like another water soaked dwarf, almost too wet to want to touch."

Dick looks at Jane and then nods at his own shirt; does she want to touch it, or doesn't she?—no, he supposed not.

"Or imagine a dwarf walking down the railroad track—it's not as ridiculous as you think. People line the track. They're trying to tell him that he's walking toward his doom, that there's a train a coming on down the line. Some of the people are hallucinating; they see the dwarf as a brick wall, it's spooking them watching it walk. There they are, mouths wide open—the dwarf's only amusement, actually."

Imagining things is a catch as catch can affair. Jane's mouth is wide open.

"If a dwarf is cornered, there's only one way he can go—up the wall. Here's a dwarf experimenting with his new wall-climbing gear. Got himself positioned in a likely corner, looks to the right and left—jeez! he's really had it this time! Better climb the wall, and fast.

"He hits that wall and is up it in no time—got all his new climbing gear with him. Good thing, too. Because the heat's on, here's another corner ready and waiting.

"Here's a dwarf climbing up and down a wall, doing an honest day's work. Sweaty little devil!"

Dick wipes his brow and sprays Jane with a flick of his wrist as he gets up to leave. It's all one fluid motion—he leaves.

Jane says to Spot, very patronizingly, glass of water in hand, "Dwarfs can get in ruts, too . . ."

What Have You Been Eating?

Writer dwarf wrote sitting up in bed. (His wife seemed to think if you wrote, you were sick, so go to bed.) The sheets were covered with eraser crumbs—likewise the handsome pajamas that writer dwarf was wont to flaunt, oftentimes crazily, without his knowledge. Ah, how he liked those pajamas.

Writer dwarf's wife whisked into the room. Her eyes swept the bed.

"What have you been eating?!"

"Nothing," said a startled writer dwarf, popping an eraser into his mouth, unseen.

In the Driver's Seat

Rather shocking news, isn't it, dwarf? Tell me, dwarf, what are you going to do now that—well,

let's face it—now that your wife's dead? Eat? Sleep? Join the workaday world?

Maybe you'll lose yourself in a factory. Eyes straight ahead, stomach in, passing what might be, on both flanks, familiar landmarks—you're sure some people care, they're just not you, that's all. There's a machine up ahead you want to take a look at, it's new to you. Doesn't actually shine, but it's new to you.

Your job is dusting, dwarf, but hunger drives you on.

The dwarf leapt out of his easy chair and let the telegram fly. His stomach had sunk a mile at least; he was going after it!

God Bless Little Writer Dwarf

Jane was saying her bedtime prayers. The day had been a hard one—Mother had insisted that Jane say every last one of her prayers. Morning prayer, breakfast prayer, noon prayer, supper prayer, bedtime prayer, snack prayers—Jane wondered about Mother.

But not constantly.

"God bless Scot and Sally, and God bless Dick and Spot, and God bless little Writer Dwarf . . ."

Something About Jane

Jane was being pointed at and she didn't like it one bit. "Some day you two are going to grow up!" she stamped. And with a toss of her head she disappeared into the house.

Dick and Spot walked away still pointing, as if there was something about Jane that had almost frozen them.

Past a Certain Point, Just Look at the Haze

"Some people are having a heyday these days, due to the new technology. Take this dwarf I know," said Dick.

"Sure," scoffed Jane. "Tell us about some old dwarf you know. Why don't you tell Spot here about the dwarf that buys your beer for you? Huh? Why don't you tell Spot, here, about him?"

"Take this dwarf I know. He's so dim-sighted he can't see things unless they're within six inches of his face—past a certain point, just look at the haze! 'Bout as close to being blind as you can get. Glasses simply don't help. Carries one of those sixty-second cameras with him wherever he goes. Takes a picture of whatever he thinks (judging by the haze) he wants to see, waits sixty seconds, and looks at the picture. Looks at it more than you'd look at the original, Jane. After which careful perusal, if he decides to walk off in that direction, he knows just where he's going and how to get there. He can see for miles with a good snapshot."

"Think of the expense."

"Funny you should say that. I'm out on kind of a mercy mission for him, was wondering if you could contribute? Help a blind dwarf see?"

"You just want some beer money," Jane said sadly.

The Dwarf, He Sighed

The dwarf advanced cautiously, learnedly, ridiculously. Mumbo-Jumbo was dead. The bullet had made its entrance through his right side, pierced one, maybe both lungs.

The dwarf was a better shot than that. Even if Mumbo-Jumbo had been feinting and leaping about

like some crazy native, the dwarf could have killed him instantly. Like a crazy native, Mumbo-Jumbo could have died.

Instead, this.

The dwarf, having demonstrated to his satisfaction that his victim was dead (if you jump up and down on him like a crazy native and he doesn't even move . . .), slumped exhausted to the ground.

The trees, the bushes, the little animals of the jungle, even the jungle floor seemed to shrink away from him. All was silent.

The dwarf imagined the big animals of the jungle shrinking away. He snickered. They sure were quiet. Not like some crazy natives he knew.

"No," he sighed, "not like some crazy natives he knew."

You've Got Me

Spot stood between Dick and Jane, but he wasn't exactly their center of attention. Dick and Jane were looking all about the room.

"Now, if I were Spot, where would I be?" Dick queried.

"Nowhere, baby, nowhere," said Jane.

"No. I mean, where would I be hiding?"

Jane shrugged. "You've got me."

Spot danced on his hind legs like a trained dog.

Grounded

Dick looked up, dragged the words out of the air. "If I were a dwarf, where would I be." He answered himself lightly, breezily—"Oh, I suppose walking down the railroad track. It'd be kind of weird at first, being a dwarf and all. But I'd get used to it."

Jane looked at him in awe—she worshipped the ground he walked on, she worshipped the ties.

Baby Legs

Finding the world a bit too much, the dwarf essentially retreated. Not a hasty retreat, pursued by fleet-footed and horrible demons, but a rather casual retreat with plenty of time to look back and wonder. In short, a retreat he could call home. A comfortable home, a simple home—a home so modest and unpretending it almost took care of itself!

The dwarf spent much of his time looking out the picture window, back along the way he had come.

The way looked tantalizingly easy.

Looked. He was careful not to disregard what he had learned from experience. Just a short while ago, things had been a bit too much. There were his old footprints to prove it. They led right up to his door, permanent outdoor fixtures that seemed unmindful of all that the elements dished out. He followed the old tracks with his eyes.

The issue was best approached scientifically, from his seat at the picture window.

His was a keen eye. He sized up the different distances in hops, skips, and jumps—getting from here to there, for instance, would be fun . . .

It was at night, in his dreams, that he proved to himself just how much fun it could be. What was this that lay barely outside his door—a playground? Here he was swinging on a swingset, riding the merry-go-round, and seesawing—this must be a

dream!—all by himself.

With the dawn, however, came doubt. Without a shadow of doubt, he doubted. That was for sure! Still, the way looked tantalizingly easy. The dwarf ventured out.

This was it, then. He walked away from his retreat, using his old footprints as stepping stones. If they had been anybody else's footprints, he would have had to jump from one to the next. That would have been a bit too much!

After all, he wasn't out to stretch his legs; he had to live with them.

The footprints, running in the opposite direction, twisted and turned his ankles horribly.

It's a Small World

Spot, intent on an insect, wasn't aware that Dick was stealing up on him. Dick made a big show of things, as if meeting his dog was a pleasant surprise. "Spot!

"Small world, isn't it?" he prompted, swatting Spot around.

Somewhere, Not Too Far Away

Dick looked and looked, but Jane and Spot were nowhere to be found. It was obviously some kind of game. They were hiding, toying with him, pushing him to the breaking point.

Three could play that game—maybe even more. He hid in the bushes, breathing silently to himself.

Somewhere, not too far away, Spot was panting. He hadn't been able to hear him before. Dick turned around, ever so quietly, to see if he could spot him through the bushes.

A little hard—there was a dwarf behind him. He was just big enough to block Dick's view.

Dick looked him over.

Nodding his cool approval, Dick turned back around. It was OK, he rationalized; the dwarf was breathing silently to himself, he wouldn't spoil it all. Why, he was better at the game than Spot! As a matter of fact, Dick recalled, it had looked as though the dwarf was taking this game quite seriously.

Beads of sweat were fastened to Dick's brow, the costume jewelry of fear.

God Bless Little Writer Dwarf, Revisited

Jane closed her eyes. What a day!

"God bless Dick and God bless Spot and God bless little Writer Dwarf . . ."

"Why, thank you. Although I doubt if it'll do any good."

Jane kept her eyes closed. "Dick?" No answer.

"Sp-spot?" No answer.

"Li-li-little Wr-r-riter Duhwarf?" she stuttered. No answer.

She opened her eyes. No one was there.

There was a note on her bed.

"And God help Jane," she read aloud.

The Dick at the Top of the Stairs

Dick sat at the top of the basement steps. Dwarf after dwarf had been walking past him for what seemed hours. They materialized, one at a time, out of the dark at the foot of the stairs and ascended steps that were almost too steep for them. It reminded Dick

of dreams he had had—and was going to have again, he bet himself—of climbing stairs that were too big for him. In these dreams, he never had a clear idea of why he was climbing. There didn't seem to be any end to the staircases he picked, so where could he be going?

All the time that he climbed, weary beyond words, the notion that climbing staircases like these was an end in itself lurked in the back of his mind—and it bothered him to no end.

"Climb, climb, climb," the stairs seemed to say, woodenly.

Also, there was the prevailing fancy that the person who had built the staircase was insane. With this came an awareness of a certain atmospheric closeness about the staircase (as if the insane person could have touched him.) The air was old and stale, it had been used before.

The railings were always rickety, sometimes breaking off and falling away from his hand. At other times he came to places where the railing was no longer intact. But at no time did he hear footfalls from above to explain their absence. And at no time did the sound of someone else breaking railing greet his ears, either from above *or* below.

He had been alone, miserably alone.

Another dwarf reached the landing. Like all those that had come before, it uttered what it had apparently been told was a password. "It's a small world," the dwarf said confidently. And then hurried on through the kitchen and out the door without waiting for a countersign.

From the Floor

Jane pouted, sizing up the effect in her hand mirror. It wasn't quite what she wanted. Her pout deepened.

Concentration was not only important, it was indispensable.

Spot watched her from the floor. Then again, he was watching a lot of things. They seemed to be all over.

Where Does the Railroad Lead?

As he walked up to the dwarf, Dick's mouth worked soundlessly.

"Where does the railroad lead?" he asked cryptically.

The dwarf looked at Dick, surprise hastily etching his features.

"Why, to you," the dwarf said.

Traces of Their Haste

Dick beat Jane getting done with supper and fairly flew out of the house. Jane was right behind him.

With a final slam of the screen door, the game was over.

Hasty meals, however, leave traces of their haste. Dick and Jane had milk moustaches and—a sure sign of hurry!—milk beards that spilled out onto their clothes.

They stared at each other! it was as if the way they ate, they were growing old before their time.

The Paper Doll Effect of Heaven: A Melodrama

"Once upon a time (there are no dates to re-

member) a dwarf lived happily. Spring, summer, fall or winter, it was all the same to him. In the spring he mostly just lay on the sloshy ground/in the summer he mostly just lay on the grass/in the fall he mostly just lay on leaves/and in the winter he mostly just lay on the snow.

"Some people say it was all this lying about that made him happy. What else could it have been? they ask.

"Others maintain that the dwarf was happy *in spite* of all the lying about he did—that his high spirits were insuppressable.

"At any rate, the majority acknowledges, the dwarf was happy. *Was* happy.

"One day the dwarf was making snow angels. It was winter and that was the way he kept warm (besides having fun.) He made his snow angels very close together, so they were connected to each other through the tips of their wings and through the hems of their gowns. They looked as if the angels who had made them might have been a string of paper dolls.

"As the dwarf worked, the string grew. He couldn't have been happier.

"And then, an Angel of the Lord appeared unto him. The heavens dimmed momentarily, like the lights of a house when the furnace comes on. He didn't swoop down out of the sky or fly out from behind the dwarf's ear, He simply appeared as if He had been standing there all the time, only invisible.

"His outline and features were for the most part as clear as a bell, and He quite effectively blocked the dwarf's way. In fact, His materialization was a bit more than complete. At the tip of each wing and at a place right below each wing on the hem of His gown, were snaps that had the glint of brass about them. The snaps at His wingtips held the beginnings of two other wingtips, and the snaps on the hem of His gown held the beginnings of two other hems. These beginnings were a bit cloudy around the edges—the dwarf eyed them uncertainly.

"Noticing the dwarf's gaze, the Angel of the Lord looked to Himself. He caused the beginnings to disappear along with half of each brass snap.

"The dwarf applauded. Without getting up.

"The Angel of the Lord glowered, His face as dark and ominous as thunder clouds, then gestured in disdain at the dwarf's puny snow angels. He was bigger than all of them rolled up into a ball.

"The dwarf couldn't help but notice the Angel of the Lord's glowering countenance. He looked as though he wanted to hide from it. He crawled under the hem of the Angel of the Lord's gown.

"It was almost too dark to make snow angels.

"But there was plenty of room.

"It was his first chance at interior decorating. In high spirits, he stuck to his paper doll effect. It was as if his snow angels were made for each other."

"Why is the dwarf still happy?" asked Jane, when Dick had finished his story. "I thought you said he *was* happy, meaning that that was no longer the case. Why isn't he sad?"

"I don't know," said Dick. It was almost as if the dwarf had gotten away from him.

The Great Smoothing Over of Things

The dwarf stopped in his tracks. Wiping sweat from his brow and then shading his eyes with both hands, he gazed at what lay ahead of him. The desert was everywhere.

It was perfectly flat. Each particle of sand was in its place. "After all the sand in the hourglass had run down," thought the dwarf, influenced by his surroundings and affected by the heat, "someone came by to smooth it out."

There was no vegetation on the desert; nor was there any other sign of life, all signs of life having been effaced. Only the railroad tracks broke the golden monotony of the sand.

The dwarf had a lot of walking to do—the tracks stretched on out of sight. But whereas the desert covered the entire horizon (in fact, in places seeming to rise above the horizon in sandstorms,) the railroad tracks were nowhere near it before they grew narrower and narrower.

What actually lay ahead of the dwarf, was a tight squeeze. No great smoothing over of things could hide that.

The Early Years, The Formative Years

On May 10, 1869, the Union Pacific Railroad coming from the east met the Central Pacific Railroad coming from the west and the two were ceremoniously joined.

In other words, at Promontory, Utah, the golden spike was driven.

During the height of the celebration that took place right after the driving of the spike, a dwarf separated himself from the crowd around the tracks and walked off. Once out of town, he took the tracks.

The golden spike was withdrawn and put on a shelf in Palo Alto.

The Jigsaw Puzzle of the Screen Door and The World Outside

For Jane, the screen door held a momentary fascination. She attested that its meshwork made a jigsaw puzzle out of the world outside. Dick said he thought that was clever—was she the genius who had put the jigsaw puzzle together?

"No, silly," said Jane, flattered. "It comes pre-assembled."

"Pre-assembled, eh? Anyway, I've never seen a jigsaw puzzle made entirely of square pieces. All the puzzles I've ever seen had interlocking pieces; that way they wouldn't come apart so easily."

"This one will never come apart," Jane said, like a saleslady who was pleased to represent such a fine, quality product. "It can't come apart," she added with simple finality.

"What fun is a pre-assembled jigsaw puzzle that you can't take apart to put together?" Dick thought. It puzzled him.

"What will they think of next?" he marvelled aloud.

A dwarf stepped into the puzzle.

The Dwarf and the Mirror

The dwarf looked in Jane's hand mirror. Ah! Just what he'd been looking for.

Himself.