

# LEAPIN LARRY

now before i get goin i got to warn you that the heart cannot plead ignorance. the story you're about to encounter is true. so don't try and pretend you can't read cause that's what you get for going to college, anyway. i guess that's the trouble with writing for a newspaper. you're always afraid you'll be walking down the street and see somebody shining his shoe or coddling fish with your column. today, a philosophical revelation, tomorrow a newspaper.

leapin larry and the fish they're not cartoon characters. larry she's a garage mechanic for d&e motors and the fish she's a mail clerk for a bustling downtown insurance company. leapin larry is also a private detective on the side.

i wish i could say my relationship with larry and the fish was a voluntary one but as it happened it was quite the other way around. for one year, six months, and twelve days i was tailed, hounded, spied upon, and in short, metamorphasized, by the two. it started out one day when i was walking home from school. i heard footsteps. i turned slowly and saw a squatting shadow. i figured it was just another pervert or some big dog takin a leak. but when i got in the front door it was still out there. and it was writing something in a little notebook. aw hell, it's just in my imagination. what did i know.

i got into my car the next day and noticed a paper attached to the antenna. big bright capital reds. WE ARE WATCHING YOU. signed with a skull and crossbones. as if i didn't know i was being watched. i began to detect breathing over my telephone. and it wasn't mine. and it wasn't anyone i knew cause i'm afraid of phones. all i ever do is listen to the dial tone when i can't sleep. or sometimes i call the operator to ask her the time. but mostly the only talking i do is about life and stuff with my buddy from wilbraham, massachusetts. the zip code of wilbraham, massachusetts is 01095.

during the next few weeks strange letters started appearing. i say strange for two reasons. first, because i'm afraid of mailmen; all my bills and hate mail are directed to general delivery. and second, these letters had stamps whose origins i had never seen, avacado rifles and okre submarine sandwiches. things i couldn't understand.

the letters were always scrawled in red. and the capitals had

AND

THE

FISH



ragged wings on them. it was not until the fifth letter that i found a clue. it was in this particular letter that the drawings started showing up. it was the usual message, something along the line of WHAT DO YOU WANT GOOD GRAMMAR OR GOOD TASTE, but at the bottom was a tiny representation of the god mercury. and he was leaping through the air with a domesticated salmon. they were both smiling. mercury had three eyes, and they were all on the same side of his nose.

the suspense mounted with each ensuing month. i was getting pretty nervous. i started walking backwards to make sure i wasn't being followed. i had my phone disconnected. i had to write to operator 555 to find out the correct time. and it was always slow. i stopped driving the car. i boarded up my mail slot and plastered a mammoth I GAVE decal on my front door.

everywhere i went i could feel their presence. especially larry because hers was three times as bad. i stopped my daily track workouts after i noticed cleat marks behind me everytime i turned around. and i knew they weren't mine because i'm afraid of cleats. i always run barefooted.

i became a total recluse. i quit school and stayed at home all day shivering. one day, along about the fourteenth month, i had smelled mercury in my ventilator. so i had my heating turned off. i just sat there in my rocker from one hour to the next. i had no other furniture. one dinner during the eleventh month i had noticed ball bearings attached to the legs of my table.

the climax had to come soon. my nerves were shot. i couldn't go to my doctor because i knew he was out to get me, too. everytime i saw a white coat i broke out in hives. the letters kept coming. i started hearing tapping on my walls at night. and all the time to the tune of a toronto dominion cash register.

it would be easy for you to say i was imagining all this. and indeed it would have done wonders for my own peace of mind if i could have believed it. but the fact is that i reached the breaking point on the twelfth day of the nineteenth month. i awoke from a drowsy sleep and went through my daily ritual of parting my hair. i had to get some sort of strenuous exercise or i knew i would not. i looked down to the puddle beneath the water pipes (i am afraid of mirrors. i don't understand them) and fell back in horror. A THIRD EYE! i raced up and down the stairs and screamed as loud and as long as i could. i pounded my fists against the floor. my ultimate salvation could only come from the lord. i got to my knees and started reciting my lessons when my body began its first series of convulsions. by the last quarter of the full moon it was over.

now leapin larry might not be the best secret agent in the world but she sure knows how to fix cars. and the fish's breath will just take yours away. needless to say, the insurance company is still bustling. besides, the railroad needs a new crossing signal.

— by Gail Shister

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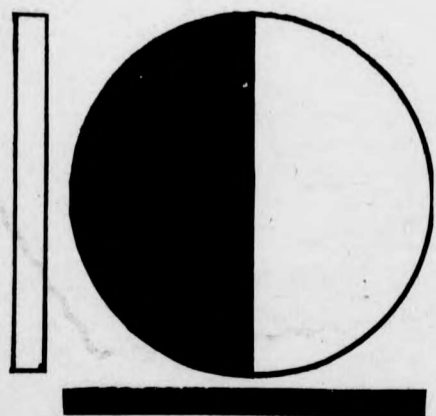
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