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# The Not So Jolly Green Giant

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by Paul Rose Jr.

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It started out as a quiet day – for a change – in the Independent News Service offices on the third floor of the Old Colony Building for a change. No monsters, no shouting, which of course means no Tony Vincenzo. Well, for the moment, at least.

It had drizzled a bit the night before. It didn't wash anything clean, but was just enough moisture to make the dust and grime a bit darker. Ah, well, at least it was a cooler day. High in the mid-70s, Bob Sirott on WLS promised during my morning drive.

I was relaxing, feet propped up, enjoying yesterday's Chicago Defender – gotta see what our competitors are reporting on – when the relative calm of the day was interrupted by the most infernal racket. Jangling, jangling, jangling... Finally, blessed silence.

And then a noise that can best be described as contained caterwauling – Monique Marmelstein screeching, "Kolchak!"

I slowly lowered the paper to see her standing inches away from me, holding the receiver of my desk telephone. "For you!"

I stifled a heavy sigh and took the handset from her.

"Yes, this is Carl Kolchak."

I glanced up. She was still standing there, glaring at me. I shrugged and waved her away as the voice on the other end of the electronic transmission came into my ear.

I listened for a moment, smiling.

“Jack McGee! Haven’t heard from you in a month of Sundays. Word is you fell off the deep end. Uh, huh. Uh, huh. Big story? You don’t say?”

I listened as he vaguely detailed the ‘special assignment’ he’d been on for a couple years now. I was pretty sure even The National Register had fired him by now. They needed ‘proof’ of alien babies and politicians having sex with goats, and word was McGee was adrift, chasing some white whale all across the country.

And here he was, back in Chicago, insisting he couldn’t say too much over the phone. But he was certainly selling it hard.

“Wouldn’t believe it myself? Beyond the realms of my imagination? Heh. I don’t know; I can imagine quite a bit.”

He laughed, mirthlessly. I’m pretty sure he didn’t get the reference. Obsession doesn’t leave a lot of time for checking out a movie.

“Okay, okay.”

I glanced up to see my financial benefactor, Anthony Albert Vincenzo, walk into the office, already working up a head of steam. I wondered briefly what had gotten his goat on this fine Wednesday, then caught myself. If I needed to know, he wouldn’t be shy to inform me. Until then...

Thankfully he was making a beeline for his office.

I turned my attention back to the phone conversation.

“Meet you for lunch? Well, I don’t know Jack... Oh. Oh, you’re paying? Well, yes, how about La Tour? Oh, okay, not that nice. I see. Our old booth at Manny’s? Sure, perfect.”

I glanced at my watch, estimating traffic backups.

“I’ll see you there around two pm. Okay. Sounds great; thanks, Jack.”

“Why are you wasting time meeting that old hack? Jack McGee is the one reporter who makes you look sane.”

Why was everyone standing so close to me today? The whole office could hear Tony from his desk, with his office door closed, and yet here he was, in my face – his own florid and sweaty. Clearly he’d decided to bring whatever was bothering him into my world. He punctuated his statement with an index finger to my chest.

I took a small step back, gracious in retreat, then smiled wanly and shrugged.

“He’s paying?”

Tony glared at me for a moment. I could see the debate behind his eyes. Thankfully, for whatever reason, silence won over sharing. For the moment.

“Don’t spend the whole day there. I need you here to, to...”

He cast his glance around the office. It was probably too quiet for him. He thrived on chaos, as much as he incessantly complained about it. Without a looming deadline or a city-wide disaster, he often seemed purposeless.

Just as I assumed I was in the clear, he seized on an opportunity - “...to help Ron out with research.”

“On the City Council piece? Seriously? I’d rather take over the Miss Emily column again.”

“Don’t tempt me.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it.”

I carefully skirted around Tony to grab my camera and tape recorder off the desk. His eyes never left me, but he didn’t say anything more, so I snatched my hat from where it had fallen next to the trash can and plopped it on my head.

“I’ll call if I get anything juicy.”

Tony rolled his eyes and headed back to his office. As I slipped out the door, I heard him holler for Ron.

Instead of pulling it shut behind me, I took off for the stairs. That was one assignment I wouldn’t fight Updyke for. Not in a million years.

I had a little bit of time to kill before I needed to meet Jack, so I switched on my police scanner as I rolled out of the parking lot. No way was I going to stay within sight of a potentially mundane assignment.

I shifted gears as I pulled out onto North Ogden, headed for Fulton. I drove slowly, almost coasting through the Fulton Market. Two more warehouses were being taken over by the new hippies... No, Yuppies – that’s what they call them. Gentrification displaces the West Loop Skid Row.

The police radio squawked. A disturbance near the Magnificent Mile. Something big, it sounded like.

Instead of taking Canal Street south, I hooked a right.

Following the subtle clues in the police broadcast – and the far less subtle path of the Chicago PD chopper, I found myself on the corner of McClurg and Grand. Seeing the knot of police officers moving about, I pulled to the curb, threw my PRESS sign onto the dash and jogged after a familiar face.

“Captain! Captain Jonas!”

“It’s Sergeant Jonas now. As you well know, Kolchak!”

My name sounded like a foul smelling cheese in his mouth.

“What’s going on around here? Is it true you had a run in with a Brobdingnagian beast?”

The former homicide detective seethed at me.

“A what? You know, I don’t care. I don’t have time for reporters. And even if I did, I wouldn’t have time for you, Kolchak. So get lost!”

“But Captain – I mean Sergeant! Can I get a comment—“

Out of the corner of my eye, something caught my attention. A half-naked man, dressed in tattered jean shorts and not much else. He was sneaking out of a coin-operated laundry with a bundle of what I guessed were someone else’s clean clothes.

I ducked behind a building and peeked out, watching surreptitiously as he tried three, no, four doors, finally gaining access to the University of Chicago's River East Medicine.

I waited til I saw him squeeze into an open elevator, then rushed over, letting myself in the building.

I checked his elevator car numbers, even as I pressed the button for another – it looked like he was going all the way to the top.

The doors on the left opened and I dashed in, pressing the button for the roof.

When the doors on my car opened a few moments later, I saw the man, now clad in brown slacks that were highwaters on him, buttoning the plaid dress shirt he'd also taken.

“Hey, there. What's going on up here!”

The man whirled around, fear and anger flashing in his eyes.

While I'd like to think my mere presence strikes fright into the hearts of police detectives and politicians who would obscure the truth, it is the fear of discovery. That is not the fear I saw in this man's eyes. Nor, do I think, was he afraid of me, but rather, possibly himself? But perhaps I write from the perspective of hindsight, as you will soon learn.

“Please. Don't stop me. I just need to check on some results in the cancer studies section. It'll only take a few minutes. Then I'll leave.”

“The cancer studies center? And you needed the laundry because..?”

“Look, I don't mean anyone any harm, but there's a little girl who needs my help. My name is Dr. David Barrister, and I only want to do what's right. But I can't if you stop me.”

So the apparent homeless man was a doctor. A genius vagrant. Certainly a new twist.

“And if I believe you, Dr. Barrister?”

He kept backing up, away from me, getting closer and closer to the edge of the roof.

“Why don’t you come over here? Away from the edge. I’m a reporter, not a police officer. Maybe I can help you.”

He laughed drily.

“Reporters have not really been there in my time of need recently.”

He shifted, skirting the ledge, eyes on me.

“Look, you want a story? I’ll give you a story – an exclusive – but first I need to get those test results. I’ll come right back here, I promise.”

I glanced back, realizing what he was likely planning. I am not always a man of action, but in that moment, I was suddenly of two minds.

Almost subconsciously, I felt adrenaline flood my system, and it was as if the world around me slowed down. I saw him lurch, targeting the door behind me, even as I felt myself rush at him. Instead of getting around me, he stumbled and started to fall – the wrong direction.

He flailed backward, his bare heel catching the metal corner of the soffit, leaving blood behind.

I dropped my camera as I took two more steps, reaching for him.



I grasped his arm, then suddenly felt his whole weight as he and gravity dragged me to the precipice he had fallen over. I felt my ribs surely bruise as they impacted.

I tried to hold on – I would not have any man’s death on my conscience, even an confused clothing thief. But even as I dropped my tape recorder and reached out with my other hand to bolster my grip, his eyes dilated, becoming almost milky white, and he convulsed wildly.

He snapped out of my clutches, for a moment, almost suspended in mid-air. I lunged, trying to recapture my grasp, but he was still writhing. I couldn’t gain a purchase, and then gravity took hold, sending him plummeting down, down, down.

I watched as long as I could. At the last moment, I turned away. From 16-stories up, it wouldn’t matter that he was falling into water. The surface tension on the swimming pool would have shattered his spine, if he didn’t pancake completely.

I heard an incredibly loud splash. Louder than it should have been, to my reckoning, for a man of his size. Then I heard something even stranger. A roar – louder than any lion or any of the strange creatures I have encountered.

I wheeled back to the edge of the roof, looking down.

Even from that distance, what emerged from that pool was not a man. It was not like anything I’d seen – and I’ve seen more than any man’s share of unusual sights. A beast, a great hulking green goliath, 8-feet tall if he was a foot, muscles bulging. Wearing tattered brown slacks, and a torn plaid shirt.

Stranger still was the realization that nothing else was in the water.

Somehow, and I promise you dear reader, this is true, the man who had fallen from the rooftop of a 16-story building, had transformed into this behemoth.

I scrambled to retrieve my dropped camera and aimed it at the beast, but I couldn't get the focus to work right.

I peered closer down at it. The side of the lens was dented. It must have happened when the camera impacted the roof. My attempts to save the clothes thief had cost me photographic proof of his transformation.

When I looked over the edge again, the giant was loping down Lake Shore, away from anything that might have delayed it as I made my way back down to street level.

I got back to my car just in time to talk one of Sgt. Jonas' meter maids into not giving me a ticket.

When I finally pulled into Manny's – only 90 minutes late! – my old friend had departed. The waitress said he hollered something about a hot tip in Seattle, and rushed out. I never did learn what his big story was or why he suddenly wanted to share it with me.

Perhaps he'd learned of some of my recent adventures on the down low – stories often get shared with others of our ilk, even if they never see newsprint. And while I was never one for giving in to the hoodoo and tabloid nonsense that folks like McGee subscribed to... Well, if you're reading this, you know the truths I've been exposed to could be easily misinterpreted that way. Labels, accurate or not, keep the world organized to some extent, and so we acquiesce.

I raced back to my desk and pecked out the story as best I remembered it. Maybe not my best work, but a story that needed to be told.

Tony Vincenzo did not agree.

“A jolly green giant? Are you kidding me, Carl? I can’t print this nonsense! I run a reputable paper here, not some bathroom rag.

“It’s true, Tony! Every word of it.”

“Nobody cares if it’s true or not, Kolchak. Haven’t you figured that out by now? Even if I did believe this unequivocal nonsense you’ve turned in, I just got a call from a 3-star Air Force General. Everything you claim you saw was part of a highly classified defense mission. I print it and you and I both end up in Leavenworth. Then who’ll run things? Monique?”

“I could manage...”

“That was a rhetorical question, Marmelstein. Do you know what rhetorical means? Go call your Uncle Abe and ask him.”

She stomped off, grumbling.

“I know!”

We both turned to look at an elated Ron Updyke.

“What!?”

“I know. I know what rhetorical means.”

Remembering it now, I am amazed there wasn’t actual steam pouring out of Tony’s ears.

I couldn’t keep the smirk off my face or the sarcasm out of my tone – although I’m not sure Ronny would have noticed, regardless.

“You should probably look up irony then.”

Ron looked like he was seriously contemplating it, as Tony swiveled his ire back to me.

“Do we have a problem, Carl? Do I need to draft you a letter of recommendation for The National Register?”

I pondered again – briefly – why he kept me around; kept me on the payroll he was always complaining about when he printed only about half of the stories I wrote.

It would be a question for another day. Some mysteries are beyond even my investigative prowess.

I blinked.

“Need help with tomorrow’s crossword, Miss Emily?”

Tony didn’t wait to hear her answer. He’d gotten what he wanted.

They say with the right motivation, every man – and woman, I suppose – has within them the seeds to be someone else entirely. Two souls, chained within one body. Jekyll becomes Hyde, and often times, discovers he much prefers the darker side. The chief of sinners is also the chief sufferer. I am not privy to the forces that might shape a man from a lonely drifter to a rage driven beast, I just have to hope it is not within me, nor that I shall reach my grave before having ever learned. ‘It is one thing to mortify curiosity, another to conquer it.’ As for me, my curiosity leads me ever and always in pursuit of the truth. And hope that Dr. David Barrister, the clothes thief turned monster shall, in his curiosity, find his own redemption someday.

I remain your humble reporter,

Carl Kolchak.