

The View From Jeremy's Butt

by Con Chapman

It's 5 p.m., and I'm trying to decide whether to run for the 5:15 train or hang in until the 5:30 and squeeze in another three-tenths of a billable hour. I'm leaning towards the 220-yard dash to the station when my phone rings.

"Hullo," I say and it would take more *amour propre* than I've got to say that I sounded cheery.

I wait for a response, but at the other end of the line there is merely dim background noise, as if from a restaurant; glasses clinking, people chatting in the distance, faint music.

"Hello," I say again, but then I realize what's happened. My partner Jeremy is out on the town, trying to find media & entertainment clients whose work he will hand off to me. He's put his phone in his back pocket and "butt-dialed" me—for the third time this week. We're a team, a Mr. Inside and a Mr. Outside, like Davis and Blanchard of Army football fame in the 40s. He has a good time, I'm the miserable scrivener.



Glenn Davis, Mr. Outside, and Doc Blanchard, Mr. Inside

“HELLO!” I say louder than before, hoping he’ll hear me.

“Hello?” a tinny metallic voice replies.

“Who’s this?”

“Jeremy’s phone. Well, at least one of them.”

Great. Some people get Jeremy’s assistant, some get his assistant’s go-fer. Me? I get a hunk of metal and plastic.

“Does he know he butt-dialed me again?”

“Un—the essence of butt-dialing is you don’t know you did it.”

The little guy’s got me there. “So where are you?”

“The Swan,” he says, referring to a faux gentleman’s club-decor restaurant that sprang, as in Greek mythology, out of the forearm of an upscale shopping mall last year, looking 100 years old on the day of its birth.



"Nice. Any . . . celebrities in sight?"

"The usual," he says, casting implicit scorn on Boston's B—or is it C-list?—scene. "There's a TV weatherman who's trying to impress a hot babe at the bar with the ten-day extended forecast."

"I know that's a real turn-on for some women."

"There's an aging musician whose job is to hang with real rockers when they come to Beantown on tour."

"You don't have to mention his name. Anybody else?"

"A screenwriter with one big hit and nothing but flops since. Hold on, I'm going to lose you."

The phone goes silent. Ten, twenty seconds pass. I'm about to hang up when I hear "You still there?"

"Yep—what happened? I don't recall any tunnels in that restaurant."

"He sat down for a second, then he saw somebody he wants to hock for business."

"God bless him."

So peaceful!

"I don't know how he does it," Mr. Phone says. "Me—I'd like to be in my cradle recharging right now."

"And I'd like to be home. Does it look like he's going to score any work tonight?"

"Uh . . . I don't know. He's talking to an aspiring actress right now."

"Good luck with that. You can't make a living doing ten-minute play contests in Boston."

"You would know."

"Hey!"

"The truth hurts. Wait—I spoke too soon," Phone Guy says. "He's got a fish nibbling at the bait."

"Who is it?"

"Somebody who knows somebody who invested in a Boston movie and now is living in a mansion that has its own zip code."

"There's a sucker born every minute," I say. I'm shaking my head, but he can't see me.

"You know, P.T. Barnum didn't say that. It was David Hannum—a banker fer Christ sake."

David Hannum

"Tell me something I don't know."

"Like what a quadratic equation is?" comes the riposte.

Touche. If I'd paid attention in high school math class I wouldn't have ended up in law school. "So—does it look like he's going to close the deal?" I ask, getting back to business.

"I can't tell. He's getting out his card . . ."

"Crap."

"He's doing the 'touch' thing on the arm."

"That's usually a clincher."

"Here comes his hand. Looks like he's going to call you intentionally this time."

"Okay—thanks for the head's up."

"Nice talking to you."

"You too," I say before the phone goes dead. Five seconds later—Jeremy's got me on speed dial—it rings again.

"Hi Jeremy."

"How'd you know it was me?"

"I've got a platinum membership for Dionne Warwick's Psychic Friends Hotline."



"Heh," he says. He does this when you say something he perceives is intended as humor. He likes to conserve his real laughs for clients and prospects. "Say—have you got time to write up a deal memo for me?"

"Can you fax me the napkin you wrote it on?"

"Heh." See what I mean.

"Seriously, Jeremy. I was just about to leave. Working with you is like going to the Clark Gable School of Law."

"What do you mean?"

"Since you only watch new Hollywood releases, you wouldn't know. Clark Gable is a land speculator in an old western, and he negotiates late into the night. When he finally gets the other side to agree, everybody shakes hands and Gable says 'Excellent gentlemen. I'll call my lawyer and the papers will be ready in the morning.'"

"Heh. So anyway the deal is . . ."

"Jeremy . . . I've gotta go. Unlike you, the clinking cocktail glass scene isn't for me. I need to be in bed by ten."

"Right after Rin-Tin-Tin, right."

"Right. Although when I was a little older mom let me watch The Fugitive."

"This won't take you long—you're good at this stuff." Jeremy doesn't read novels, but he's got the Tom Sawyer thing down pat.

"I tell you what," I say. "Send me a text message with the high points. I'll draw something up for you when I get home. You don't want me drafting million dollar deals when my blood sugar's low."

"Okay," he says. Texting's okay, since it makes him look like he's doing something more important than whatever's happening right in front of him. Distant—blase—Stevie Wonder's "Mr. Know-it-All."

"Great. Say—if you wouldn't mind, could you turn off your phone when you put it in your pocket?"

"Why?"

"I'm going to try and take a cat-nap on the train. You've been butt-dialing me all week."

"Oh man. I am *so* sorry."

I can't believe it. For once in his life, Jeremy actually shows some sympathy for another human being who isn't paying for it. Me—the Bob Cratchit to his Scrooge! Maybe it's because—it's Christmas.

"Thanks," I say, feeling a lump begin to form in my throat. "I . . . I appreciate it, Jeremy."

"What?" he says, bemused. "I'm not sorry for you."

"You're not?"

"No—I'm sorry I accidentally burned so many of my monthly minutes."

