

Lunch by the Opera House

Me mates call me Davo. I was stuffin me face outside a pizza joint next to the Sydney Opera House when I saw Satan. He looked pretty much like he did in comic books. He sported a pair of horns, Mr. Spock ears, fire-engine-red skin, flash-lookin mustache and goatee, and a black satin cape and undies. But instead of carryin a pitchfork, he had an air horn. The kind attached to an aerosol can.

He snuck up behind this blue-rinsed old bird pushin a wheeled walker and pumped the horn right in her ear. The din almost made me fall outta me chair. And I was sittin a good 30 feet away. God knows what it sounded like to her. Poor thing. Shook like a dunny door in a gale she did. Then she slumped over the walker. I thought she'd croaked. But then one of her dentures fell onto the concrete and she waved to this young sheila, her granddaughter maybe, to pick it up.

“Bloody hell,” I said.

“Bloody hell what?” me girlfriend, Nirelle, said before chuggin half a glass of Diet Coke.

“Did you see that?”

“See what?”

“That bloke over there with the air horn. The one dressed like Old Nick.”

“Nick who?”

She had a quick look around, then scarfed a slice of her large Hawaiian.

Now, I mightn't be the sharpest tooth on the chainsaw, but even I could tell somethin weird was goin on. Real weird. Cause Nirelle hadn't even flinched when the horn ripped. Neither had anyone else. Seemed like me and the old bird were the only ones who'd heard the effin thing.

Satan wasn't done workin mischief. He crept up beside a tubby Chinese bloke takin snaps of the opera house. Got as close to him as a tongue kiss from Nirelle. But the bloke just ignored him. Like he wasn't there. Satan wasn't worried but. He lifted the air horn right up to the bloke's ear and let him have it point blank. The bloke gave this almighty groan, then stumbled backwards over a railin, into the harbor. Went arse over tea kettle he did. I didn't see him hit the water. Saw the splash, though. Reckon they coulda seen it from the space shuttle.

This hippy-dippy couple raced down some stairs and hauled him outta the drink. He could barely stand. Kept mutterin in Chinese at 100 miles per hour.

Satan skipped around the bloke, wavin the horn and twirlin his tail like a stripper showin off a bra she'd doffed. No one even glanced at him. Musta thought he was a street performer.

“Oi, Nirelle.”

“Whaaat? I'm tryin to eat.”

“You’re missin this.” I nodded towards Satan and the others.

She burst out laughin. “What happened to the Chinese guy? Did he fall in?”

“Have a butcher’s at who’s with him.”

“Why? Who are they?”

“Oh come off it, will ya? Stop pretendin there’s no bloke there in a devil getup.”

She gave me a pull-the-other-one look, then polished off a slice of garlic bread. Had to be bloody kiddin me, though. How could she not see Satan? He stood out like a beer gut on a ballerina.

Hang on a sec. What if she really was kiddin? What if this was some sorta *Candid Camera* stunt she was in on? She liked a good practical joke, Nirelle did. Dunno what I’d do, though, if some dropkick waltzed up to me and said, “Smile, you’re on Candid Camera.” I’d probably knuckle him. Nah, I wouldn’t do that. I’d just have to grin and bare it. Nirelle’s me girl. I love her. She loves me too, believe it or not. She must do. She’s got a tattoo of me boofhead on her right butt cheek. Every time she rides me I slap meself in the face. She’d be heartbroken, not to mention bloody furious, if I got all stropky about a practical joke she helped set up.

I scoped for a cameraman, but couldn’t see anybody. He was probably hidin in plain sight. They make cameras super-small nowadays. Pervs love ‘em.

While me Mexicana was makin me eyes go watery, Satan, or the

guy dressed like him, snuck over to a teenage girl in a wheelchair. She looked like she had cerebral palsy or somethin. I knew she didn't really. It was all a put on. But she sure looked the part. I reckon the TV network behind the stunt was pushin its luck. I mean, the bit with the old lady was gonna cop some complaints. But makin fun of a disabled girl? Even a pretend one? That's riverdancin on a land mine. Talk about hard up for bloody ratins.

Anyway, the girl's mum gave her a drink from a plastic bottle with a straw in it. Satan was just inches from them. Towered over them he did. Might as well have been ant-sized, though, for all the attention they paid him. He pressed the air horn against the girl's ear. She jerked a little, mumbled something. Then he emptied the aerosol can in her. The noise was brutal. She flung about in her chair like she was havin a fit. Water spurted from her mouth, and her eyes spun up till they were egg whites. Her mum tried to hold her down. She soon got all quiet. Probably from sheer exhaustion. I could see tears slidin down her face. Them tears told me this was no *Candid Camera* stunt, this was fair bloody dinkum.

Me heart was bangin out a drum solo. The guy I thought was cosplayin Satan was the real deal. I'm six-two and a slab of muscle, but can't handle spooky crap. No effin way. When I was a kid I woke one night to find me dad's old Gerry Gee doll tryin to strangle me with a licorice whip. Me mum reckoned I was trippin out on bronchitis meds, but I dunno. Was never the same afterwards but.

Satan skipped away from the girl, grinnin from pointy ear to pointy ear. Suddenly he pulled up and turned towards yours truly. Looked me right in the eye he did. He pointed a long, bony finger at this young married couple. They had two kids with them. A little girl and a baby boy in a blue jumpsuit the dad was cradlin. Satan snickered, just like that cartoon dog Muttley, then chucked the horn over his shoulder. It vanished in a puff of black smoke. He clicked his fingers and another, bigger horn appeared. This one looked like a fire extinguisher with a megaphone on top. He held it up like some sorta trophy he'd won. Then he went all Muttley again. Didn't have to be Stephen bloody Hawkins to figure out what he was gonna do with the thing.

“Oh no,” I said. Oh shit. Don't do it. Please don't do it.”

Nirelle, who was reachin for the last slice of garlic bread, thought I was talkin to her. “I'm hungry, aren't I? You would be too if you'd sweat your bum off doin Pilates.”

Satan scooted right past the young mum and her daughter. It was the young dad he was gunnin for. Dad was bouncin baby in his arms. The two of them were gigglin away, not a care in the world. Satan was about to change all that. He parked the ginormous horn so close to the young dad's ear, the megaphone swallowed half his face. I tried yellin out to warn him, but fear'd jammed a cork in me gob. I was packin meself. Could hardly breathe. Could hardly move. Satan lobbed me a wink, the smartarse bastard, then wound one of his

spook-show fingers round the horn's trigger and squeezed.

That's when hell on earth hit.

I mean, it was the worst, most shockin din in the history of shockin dins. I already had me hands over me ears cause I knew it was gonna be nuclear loud. 'Cept it was louder. So loud me bones turned to powder and me skin to sizzlin fat. Least that's what it felt like. I think I said somethin. Nothin worth sayin, mind you. Me tongue was too numb to blow even a raspberry. Plus I couldn't hear a bloody thing with all the cathedral bells bongin in me ears. But whatever I said, whatever stupid, retarded noise I made, got Nirelle to stop feedin her face and gawk at me like I was sittin there in the nuddy.

My troubles, though, were nothin compared to the young dad's. The poor bugger. When the horn blasted in his ear, he jolted like he'd pissed on a power line. Then he froze up. Just stood there with his arms danglin by his sides.

Arms that'd been holdin the baby.

For a second the baby seemed to float in the air. It was like God or someone was holdin him up. But then gravity kicked in. Hit the concrete headfirst he did. Made this dull thump that woulda haunted an Alzheimer's patient, then bounced sideways and landed at his dad's feet. He didn't move after that. Ever again.

The young dad looked as blank as a sheet of A4. He gave this low, lifeless moan. Woulda been a roar of horror if his brains weren't

tricklin out of his ears. His wife was a different story. She took one look at the red halo round her son's head and let loose a scream that rattled the harbor bridge. Turned me soul to ice it did. She scooped him up and held him to her chest, wailin hysterically. Blood got all over her white blouse.

The little girl was bawlin her eyes out. She wrapped herself round her dad's legs and wouldn't let go.

People rushed to the family's aid. Not that there was much they could do for the baby. Or the young dad.

Nirelle drifted over to the millin crowd like she was hypnotized or somethin. I woulda told her not to go, but got distracted. I'm talkin majorly. Satan was headed my way.

Shit a brick!

Me eyes imitated squeezed balloons, and me chin hit me Air Force 1s. He stopped dead and copied me shocked expression. Takin the piss he was. Next thing I know he's flittin towards me all jumpy, like in a movie with frames missin. Then I'm lookin up at him and he's grinnin down at me. Was a long way up to that grin. About seven feet, I reckon. He cranked open his mouth. It got bigger and bigger till it covered his whole head. It was full of these jagged rail-spike teeth made of cracklin flames. You could hear 'em cracklin. And then he chuckled. If you could call it a chuckle. It sounded like a million screamin people bein fed feet-first into a million roarin wood chippers. How I didn't paint me jorts brown I'll never know.

His eyes started blazin with anger. Musta been pissed that I could see him. Got the feelin I was about to become a spit roast or somethin heaps worse. I didn't wanna die. I didn't wanna leave Nirelle. She hadn't even had her boob job yet.

Satan smirked. He was gettin off on me fear. He leaned down, opened extra wide, and . . . started sniffin the air. Caught a tantalizin whiff of me Mexicana, he had. He snatched a slice and molested the toppin with his huge hooter. Then he whispered somethin to it. What, I couldn't tell ya, but it burst into flames like an overheated iPhone. He gobbled the lot. As he licked his lips with his 'orrible forked tongue, he looked at me as if to say, "Ta, mate, that was effin delicious."

Nirelle was walkin back over. Could see her outta the corner of me eye. Her face was all ruddy from cryin. If Satan touched one blonde-rinsed hair on her head, I'd knock his block off. Turns out there was no danger of that happenin. With a click of his fingers, he disappeared in a burnin cloud of soot. It stank to high heaven. I spewed me guts out. "Look out, Nirrrrrrelle!"

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