

The naked man streaked across the stage like a galloping monkey and disappeared again into the crowd. He bulleted through the cheering crowd and out into the open area where he was just a naked guy standing in the grass. He was still close enough to hear the band, they were talking about what just happened.

“Let’s hear it for that man’s penis!” said the lead singer. The crowd roared.

He’d never received much applause, especially being naked in public. This band had been his wife’s favorite, so the positive response filled him with happiness and he puffed his chest out a little. It was a proud moment.

Something cold prodded him in the shoulder. “Uh, mister?” Three sunglasses-wearing cops surrounded the naked man, the one who’d spoken prodding him with a night stick.

“Where are you clothes, sir?” said the cop.

The naked man laughed—a full-bodied laugh like Santa Clause. The cops looked at each other.

“I don’t know,” said the naked man. “I do not know.” Tears blurred his vision as a spasm of chuckles seized him. The cops crossed their arms in unison.

One cop turned to another, “Wanna guess what drugs he’s on?”

The naked man held out his hand, “I’m not on anything, sirs, I swear. Give me a blood test, you’ll see.” He almost said it all without laughing.

The other cops brandished their night sticks and closed in on the man. Someone in the distance yelled, “Hey!” Everyone looked. A teenage boy with hot pink sunglasses and a yellow fedora approached holding a clump of clothes. “Here’s that guy’s clothes,” he said to the cops.

“You know this man?” said one of them, peering over his sunglasses at the brightly colored youth.

“No. He was next to me when he dropped his clothes and ran on stage. Here you go man,” the boy dropped the clothes on the ground.

“Who do you think you are?” barked the naked man, anger filling his throat.

The boy back-stepped abruptly. “Whoa, I don’t know man. Just bringing your clothes back.”

The naked man examined the pock-marked pizza face of the boy. His overbite. His oversized nose. That scared look on his face.

“I don’t *need* my clothes, you punk. You piece of shit. I’m going to eat your face.” The naked man sprang and the cops subdued him with a few deft strokes of their night sticks.

Now, on his knees, with blood pouring from his mouth into the cool grass, he saw his wife’s face. She was trying to tell him something—maybe to not get mad at the kid for being helpful, and for not being her—but he couldn’t hear her words. This was how it always was, he could see her face, almost feel the heat of her lips as they moved, but no audible voice. It was frustrating, sensing that she was close but not being able to hear her. But just the sight of her bone-white face (even if it was a hallucination) soothed the boiling tempest beneath his skin—that thick costume of skin he would never to escape, no matter how uncomfortable, until it was buried deep in the black earth, next to his wife.

“Put your clothes on, sir,” said one of the cops, thumbing his night stick.

The naked man spat blood from his lips and squinted up to the cop. “You put them on,” he said.

“We’re not going to ask you twice,” said another cop, producing a tazer from his belt.

The naked man stood, looked each man in the sunglasses, and said, “You didn’t ask me the first time.”

“Put on your clothes or we’re arresting you,” said another cop.

The naked man turned away and took one step before he was pummeled to the ground with a bone-crushing snap. The pain exhilarated him. Perhaps a rib had snapped and punctured a lung, or maybe even his heart. An ambitious hope, he knew. The last thing he heard was the click-click-click of the tazer before he lost consciousness.

