

20. Shit In Your Ear [For dear friend, Elise, who requested some comedy]

Billings looked in total shock and disbelief into the toilet bowl. A gateau of the contents of his bowel was piled in there, and on top, like an expensive metal and plastic cherry was his earpiece. As he wiped himself he'd bent in such a way that meant his shoulder had barged his left ear. *Voila*, the cherry landed on the gateau. He looked around himself, even though he was in a cubicle and could not be observed. Hesitating, cogs whirring in his head, he considered various options. No matter what he needed to retrieve his earpiece. He grabbed some sheets of paper and delved down with his right hand, paper wadded to facilitate his grab. It was like an obscene amusement machine, a crane attempting to grab a shitty toy.

Gagging, he grabbed his earpiece, with a surround of brown gateau cream on the paper. He stood up, the wadded paper, shit and his earpiece now looking like a bizarre and quite fragrant flower in his hand. He cogitated that it was a very strange picture he made while reaching and touching the button to flush the remaining brown gateau away in a torrent of water, paper and cleaning medium. A perfume spray was ejected from a small automatic pump high on the wall, which Billings took personally as some form of insult to him and his predicament. He stood there for a moment, thinking. The biggest deal in the company's history, close to signing bar the final clauses, and if he pulls it off, well, they'd all be made for life. Several lives. *And he dropped his communicator in the toilet.*

He reckoned it ought to have a high IP rating for dust and water, but shit? He unlocked the cubicle door, looked to see if the coast was clear, and walked quickly to the sink with his flower. Pushing the button the water flow initiated out of the faucet and he dumped the earpiece into the sink, turning to throw the wadded paper and shit into the wastebin. Thinking better of it, he strode back to the toilet cubicle and threw it all into the toilet bowl, flushing it immediately after. Pivoting back, he was back at the sink ready to clean his earpiece, then he could return to the negotiations in the conference room. The sink was empty, save for the flowing water. Billings stood still, locked, his face an expression of shock and bemusement. The plughole was open, he had not blocked it with the valve.

'Oh my gawd, for fuck's sake, *you cocking idiot!!!*', he exclaimed rhetorically. His eyes bulging, he dropped to his knees to inspect the unit under the sink. It was a marble slab. There were some screw points at each corner. In a flash he had his everyday carry toolkit and knife out and he started to ease out the covering points to expose the screw heads. He was then unscrewing each of them in sequence. As always it seemed that the last one was the most difficult. Finally he was leavering the slab forward from the top with his knife blade. *Finally going my way*, Billings thought. And then the blade slipped, the slab almost returning to its original position. Which seemed bad enough, other than the issue of the blade sticking in his left thigh. 'JESUS H CHRIST and FUUUUCCCCCKKKKK!!!!', was all that emanated from his mouth before he stifled his scream with his left hand.

His eyes bulging, a vein at the side of his temple throbbing, he stared down at the self-inflicted wound in his leg. Slowly he eased the knife out, blood oozing down his trousers. He was biting his lower lip, a drop of blood seeping out and escaping down his chin. He dropped the knife, and held his leg. Turning and stumbling backwards, he grabbed more toilet paper to mop up the blood and pressurise the wound. He started to feel a little faint, but he made it back to the sink and he held on to it momentarily. He took a few deep breaths, calmed himself, cursing under his breath, and then eased himself down awkwardly to look at the pipework under and to the back of the sink. He couldn't believe it, there was a replaceable cartridge in the main outlet pipe, probably acting as a trap. He started easing out with his fingers, his left hand holding the toilet paper dressing on his leg. It took some fiddling, but the trap emerged.

So did a small gush of dirty water and gross material, landing on his lap. It stank. Ignoring this, he turned the cartridge over and the earpiece and a few bits of refuse dropped into his left hand. He

landed back on his bottom on the tiling of the restroom with a whoosh of breath. His left leg was stained with blood which was still oozing from the wound and the bottom of his shirt and lap of his trousers were covered in what was effectively foul smelling sewage. Sweat covered his face, his hair in disarray, and his hands were filthy. Managing to stand up again, pain around his leg wound. Closing the plughole valve he rinsed the earpiece of the original shit and later sewage. Wadding up paper towels he dried it as best he could and sniffed at it as if it would bite him.

Turning gingerly around to face the exit door, he placed the earpiece in his left ear and was utterly relieved that he could hear voices from the conference room. Wiping his front with his hands with more paper towels, he walked at the best speed as he could to emerge into the corridor, a few doors from the meeting. He took a few more deep breaths and then attempted to display confidence and leadership while he walked back into the negotiations. His colleagues turned to see him. All looked ashen faced and then shocked. He looked like he had been in an automobile crash. Mouths gaped and the CFO managed to stutter, 'Billings, what the fuck happened to you?!' It was then that Billings noted that only representatives of his company were present. Where was the other side? Clearly the CFO noted Billings noticing they had gone. 'Billings, you were wrong, they noted the irregularities in our accounts. We're fucked!'

Billings started laughing uncontrollably, more blood trickling from his leg wound and lower lip. The CFO looked at him as if he was a total lunatic, 'Billings, what the fuck is wrong with you, didn't you hear me? *You got shit in your ear, too?!?*' Billings howled with that question, sliding down the closed door, his laughter echoing around the room.



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