

What All Did Bill Eat?

By Nicholas Stillman

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The smell of sweet barbecue seeped into Bill's stink den. He needed to open his apartment door. Any excuse would do, or no excuse at all. Then, the door would have to stay open so all that meat juice flavor could waft in. Bill wanted to bathe in it. He'd think of something.

Bill, all 384 pounds of him, went for the door. Normally he'd pause to rub the sole of each foot on his opposite calf. This would scrape off most of the pubic hair, fly legs, and crumbs that stuck on just from walking. This time, though, he endured the grit for that glory smoke outside. Goddamn, these carpets shouldn't exist. At least on the kitchenette tiles, the dirt and dust balls blew into the corners. Sometimes, Bill's heavy footsteps could fan or scuff it under the fridge.

The smell effused through the same crack under the door that spiders crawled in through. Bill needed that smoke on him. His skin produced more grease than a man of his size could reasonably bathe off in a week. The scent from the barbecue would mix with all that sebum, almost like a drying effect.

Bill tried to look casual as he hauled the door open. He fake-squinted in the blazing summer air, mostly to crank his head and help the smoke enter each nostril. Salivation ensued. Then, some stretching...and eye rubs, and a morning groan held off until deep afternoon—anything to look appropriate while loitering in beef heaven.

His neighbor stood there, some short guy from India. He wore blue shorts, only blue shorts, and held a spatula. Bill wanted to lick the congealed yellow fat off the blade. The bottom had some brown clouding on it and spatter right up to the handle.

The neighbor also had enough brown on him to tolerate standing in raw sunlight all afternoon. Bill wondered whether the barbecue or Indian got cooked more. It felt like 88 degrees out here. Even the flies looked crispy.

The Indian guy stood statuesque and smiling. He happened to stand facing the door when it opened. Covered for now, his little barbecue hissed beside him, and that baby toy sure could emit. Bill's thoughts turned to buying a barbecue with his next Unemployment Insurance check, but only a giant one would do. A barbecue for Bill would block the little walkway at the bottom of this cement stairway.

If the neighbor moves out, I'll do it, Bill thought.

But the Indian neighbor would never leave. He looked too content with his baby barbecue and measly shorts. And the smile lingered longer than Bill could lean on the door frame.

Bill thought of something useful and took two minutes to put on some loafers. He went to check the mail—mail that didn't come today—at the front entrance of the apartment house. With the door to his basement one-bedroom left open, the heat, meat, and flies would drift inside. But some flies would drift *out* too. Christ, those flies needed to go. They shat with their entire husks, and Bill's flyswatter broke two summer's ago. He'd have to get a new one sometime.

The steps to the front entrance groaned under the sea of Bill's weight. Some asshole stuffed his mailbox with a wad of colorful shit-paper and two letters from home. When Bill returned, the Indian neighbor hadn't moved much. He did turn a bit to face the cement steps and watch the thunder jelly descend. Every moment out here felt humiliating.

The steps hurt Bill's ankles too, but he wanted that kind of pain. It slowed progress, allowing more odor to enter his stink den. Likewise, the stench from month-old garbage bags wafted outside. Shame affected Bill about as much as health commercials.

Just halfway down the steps, he could hear the trapped fruit flies ping-ponging off his garbage bag interiors. Dammit, the breeze going in would brush aside the takeout trays so delicately set over the holes in the bags. Those freaking fruit flies would escape and hover over everything.

Bill's barely-worn but devastated loafers almost kicked over a metal cylinder someone placed on his doorstep. He glanced at the smiling brown neighbor. No help there. Did that guy notice anything while practically standing guard out here? The foot-tall cylinder gleamed like the sun, and it looked like solid steel. The deliverer must have sweated a lake through his ass bringing it here. Bill felt his own groin sweat dribbling into channels already.

He picked up the cylinder. It looked like a doubly-tall soup can and weighed about the same. But no one made soup cans like this, and Bill knew every can on the market. This beast had the perfect smoothness of something that belonged in a nuclear power plant.

"Mmmm-baaagh," he burped.

Bill slammed the door and put the two letters and misdelivered cylinder on a cluttered table. He kicked his loafers off and charged for the refrigerator. The first meal today consisted of a coil of pepperoni, a microwaved onion, and two cold beer. The second can snapped open and disappeared before it warmed by one degree. Bill's beer started cold and it damn well stayed cold. Ice cubes took considerable effort to make.

"God, why do I only have one beer left?" Bill sighed. He looked at the empty six pack rings in his fridge. A month-old pile of them nested on the lower shelf.

He didn't notice, but pale blue letters appeared on the side of cylinder. They read: **PROBABLY BECAUSE SOMEONE DRANK THE REST.**