

Not My Problem

By Moe Lane

So I don't expect you to like me after reading this. Not my problem.

It happened in 1993, in Manhattan. Back then the city was a garbage can that had never been cleaned out, just left out in the sun until all the trash baked. You didn't notice the smell from a distance, or if you kept walking. I was walking a lot, me and my fresh degree in nothing useful and nothing like a clue. There's safety in numbers in the liberal arts, I guess - but nobody wanted to give any of us a job.

I didn't have any money that my parents didn't give me, so I wasn't eating fancy when I was looking for work. What I did eat was - well, I'm not scared of what may be in Manhattan now but I am scared of getting sued - but you know the place where I ate. Especially if I give you an **arch** look, right? *Right?* Figure it out or not. Not my problem.

It was this one place, right by the train station that would take me south to the home that had even less in the way

of job prospects than Manhattan. Two stories: food below, extra dining above. I ate above, because it was always quiet and dark (should have thought about that more) and because it had this bunch of murals. It was all space stuff: a couple of suns in the sky, or maybe moons - hard to remember, because that was twenty years ago. Anyway, I liked it because I would read books there. Science fiction books. Always thought that I'd write them myself, except that I didn't. Just as well. No money in it.

I'll skip over the foreplay about what happened there: wasn't really any leadup to it, anyway. One day I was up in the second floor, eating, and there were a couple of people there, too - and we all heard something from the far end of the second floor. Maybe I should explain that: you had to turn a corner to get to the bathrooms. But if you went around the next corner, you'd see restaurant stuff like mops and buckets and boxes and you knew that you shouldn't go back there.

The murals kept going on, though. Interesting, but not worth getting in trouble over, right? - Except that there was this sound, and it sounded like maybe somebody was in trouble, and so me and another guy went to go take a look. Only, there were more corners to go around, and after a few turns that didn't make any sense anymore. It

was like there wasn't **room** enough for all the turns. I got bothered by that, but it didn't bug the other guy at all. I think that he didn't care about the way that the murals kept going on, or how they started to look. I didn't want to look at them, after a while. That was the difference between me and the other guy: I'm aware that I didn't want to look at the murals, he's not aware that the murals were even there.

I bet you know where this is going, right? Yeah. Yeah. We turned one last corner, and then I saw something - REALLY, REALLY BRIEFLY - that I won't describe to you and you don't want me to describe. I ran right back the way that I came, and because I was kinda ready for it, to be honest, I had the lead on the other guy and while we were running back through the turns I listened to what I won't call anything else but 'nothing' chasing us. That's Nothing with a capital *Run, you idiot*, by the way. And I kept hearing Nothing getting closer...

Why am I alive? Because it's like the joke: when you and another guy are being chased by a bear, you don't have to run faster than the bear. You just have to run faster than the other guy. And it helps if you can block the traffic behind you.

Yeah, I told you you wouldn't like me. Because I made sure that every mop and bucket in that last stretch of corridor was between me and the other guy, and when I turned that last corner I could just hear him crashing into all that stuff. I heard him swear. Then I didn't hear anything else. Period. There were a couple of people who were still upstairs at that point. One of them asked me what happened, and I invited her to take a look around the corner if she really wanted to know. So she did. And she never came back, either. Not my problem.

Five minutes of staring at each other later, another guy got up and said that he was going to look, himself. Did **he** come back? I couldn't tell you: as soon as he announced it I got up, grabbed my book and my bag, walked down the stairs, and got out of that restaurant. Never went in there again, either.

Want to really hate me? That was it. I eventually got a job in NYC. The city got an enema. I had a lot of fun working there for the rest of the decade, as long as I stayed away from that one restaurant, which I had zero problems doing. I didn't need pills or booze or sex to not think about it. There was Nothing there to think about. So whatever happened was not my problem, because nothing was chasing me. Besides, eventually I moved away anyway.

Shoot, I haven't even thought about this in years. Only... NYC's starting to smell like hot sun and garbage again. And I dreamed of the mural last night. Never did that before. But I'm not going to go back there. It's not like those other books that I like to read: I don't have a compulsion to revisit the place, or anything. I just kind of have a compulsion to write about it.

So here I am, writing about it. One of you will see this, and you'll figure out where the restaurant is, and you'll find yourself in Manhattan one day and you'll maybe go check the mural out. And, hey, you'll probably just decide that I was writing a story because I always wanted to write one of these, because nothing will happen to you. Or maybe Nothing will happen to you, instead.

Either way? Not my problem.

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