

The
Coyote
(First three chapters)

Pete Simons

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Chapter I

Tuesday Evening, January 24

In Which a Storm Descends and a Hero Ascends

Herein dwells a tale of madness and windmills, of heroes and villains, of triumph and despair—not to mention the odd flying monkey and flamethrower. All of this actually happened. Except that the names, dates, places, dialogue, facts, and circumstances have been changed to protect the innocent and to avoid libel and defamation lawsuits.

It's a chilly, overcast January afternoon in Rockaway Beach, New York. For those readers not familiar with the local geography, Rockaway Beach is a neighborhood in Queens, one of the five boroughs of New York City.¹ Although most outsiders equate New York City with Manhattan, most of the city's people actually live in Brooklyn and Queens. In fact, if NYC's five boroughs were each considered a separate city, Queens would be the fourth-largest city in the U.S., after Los Angeles, Chicago, and Brooklyn.²

In a sixteenth-floor apartment in Rockaway, Donovan

¹ For reference, the next time you play Trivial Pursuit, the five boroughs are Manhattan, The Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island.

² And that is just one of the many interesting facts that you will learn by reading this story. You may wish to have a pencil handy so you can jot this stuff down.

Quincy is sitting at his dining room table next to Rob, his great-nephew. Donovan is fifty-eight and looks pretty good for his age. He's tall, still has all his hair, and has kept his weight down to the point that he looks gaunt. Rob looks like a twelve-year-old kid.¹

The apartment is clean and orderly. Don's furniture is attractive and well-maintained, albeit a little dated. There are four bedrooms, one of which has been converted into a library. The kitchen is a little small, but functional. The dining room table seats six, although if the table leaf is inserted, it can uncomfortably accommodate ten. Overlooking Jamaica Bay, the living room contains a couple small couches; the obligatory wall-mounted, flat-screen TV; and a pair of exceptionally tall, wobbly bookcases from IKEA, which took only three hours to construct following the easy-to-read yet impossible-to-comprehend directions. The wobble may have something to do with the four leftover parts, which may or may not have belonged in the box. But the Swedish meatballs were nice.

Don and Rob are staring at a graphic novel called *Lobsterman versus Megachef*. Don turns to Rob and says, "OK, your turn to read. We're almost done now." Rob looks down at the page.

[Frame one: Lobsterman, in his usual skintight, bright-red latex costume, is suspended by several metal chains above a vat of boiling liquid. Megachef is staring at him maliciously with his hand on a long metal bar sticking out of the floor.]

[Megachef says:] "**Now** won't you cooperate? I am prepared to pull this **lever** and **lower** you to your **death!** You're in **deep** now, Crustacean boy! But you can still **save** yourself! Just give me the **recipe** for the **mind-controlling butter sauce** and I will **release** you **unharméd!** I don't want to **hurt** you ... We could **work together!** The world can be our **oyster**—or our **lobster**, if you prefer. What do you **say?**"

[Lobsterman struggles against the chains as the steam washes over him.]

¹ Rob doesn't play a big role in our tale, so feel free to imagine him as you like.

He replies:] "You are **insane**, Megachef! I will **never** give you the **recipe** and allow you to do **evil** through those you would **control**! I would rather **die**!"

"Very well, Lobsterman! Fine. Be **shellfish** about it. **Surfs** you right then! When I pull this lever, you will become a tasty **bisque, quick**! Try not to scream like a lobster when I **porpoisely** lower you into the **boiling brine**!"

"**Lobsters do not scream**, you moron!"

"**What?!**"

"Lobsters **don't** have **vocal cords**, and they don't feel **pain**! That noise is just **compressed air** trapped in the **stomach** that is **forced out**! And do you want to know something **else** about lobsters?"

"What might that be, **Scampiman**?"

"Their **claws** can apply over 100 pounds of **force** per square inch! And I have built **my** claws with substantially **higher** pressure than **that**!" [*Lobsterman cuts one of the metal chains, which causes him to swing toward Megachef. When he clears the rim of the boiling vat, he cuts the other chain and lands squarely on top of Megachef, capturing him between his claws.*]

"**Spare me**, Lobsterman!"

"Just like **you** were going to spare **me**, Megachef?"

"Yes! I wasn't going to **kill** you!"

"You're **full** of it! But no matter. I won't lower myself to your level by **murdering** you! You'll have plenty of **time** to **perfect** your recipes—**in prison**!!"

[*Sirens are heard, and the police enter. The end.*]

"No offense, Uncle Don," says Rob, "but that was kind of lame."

Don frowns and says, "Really?" Then he relents. "OK, maybe it was a bit lame. This wasn't one of my favorites either. But what did you get out of it?"

"Um ... good triumphs over evil. No big surprise there."

"Good doesn't always win in these stories," Don replies. "Sometimes evil does, just like in real life. And sometimes good people do evil. And vice versa. Don't assume that every story follows the same pattern."

"There's something else I've been meaning to ask you. What's with all the boldface print?"

"Oh, that's just a convention used in graphic novels to

emphasize certain words. It's one of a number of unwritten rules for how to write comic book dialogue. I call it comic-speak. Did you also notice that there were an awful lot of exclamation points? In many comics, exclamation points and question marks are used more often than periods."

"Uh-huh.¹ Well, thanks, Uncle Don, that was fun, but I need to start my homework now. I don't want to be late for the Scouts meeting tonight."

"OK. What merit badge are you working on now?"

"Responsible social media."

"They have a badge for social media now? What do you have to do to earn that?"

"The first part is easy. You have to pass a test about what cyberbullying is and how to prevent it."

"Well, that's admirable. What's the second part?"

"You have to completely give up texting, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and a couple other social media sites for two whole weeks."

"Wow. How many of your friends have earned the badge?"

"Nobody so far. No one's made it past the first twenty-four hours without texting. Actually, I heard that the only Scouts to earn the badge live somewhere in the middle of Nebraska, where there's no cell phone coverage."

"Scouting's changed a lot since I was a boy. Good luck with that. Let me know if you need any help with your homework," Don says, but Rob is already gone.

Just after Rob heads out, his mother walks in the room, and Don notices the resemblance between them: dark hair, lovely hazel eyes, and a beautiful smile (although Don has observed this less often lately). She appears to be tired. Her divorce has taken a lot out of her, Don thinks.

"Graphic novels again? Uncle Don, I'm not sure he should be reading that stuff right now. Some of those books are really violent. They could give him nightmares."²

¹ In the vernacular of twelve-year-olds, this means, "You are literally boring me to tears."

² ... or make him prone to make bad puns, which is far worse. Just consider the demise of Puntus Aurelius (599 BC–650 BC), the Roman imperial jester who is widely acknowledged to be the inventor of the pun. After a particularly harrowing evening of bad jokes and wordplay, King Tullus Hostillius ominously

"Nancy, the books I share with him are like artworks. They teach about justice and the difficulty at times of distinguishing right from wrong. The heroes and villains in these books generally began their careers in justice or crime because of a personal tragedy that they had to overcome. There are some deeper ideas buried in these volumes. And you know what? Rob gets it. He picks up on the subtle nuances, and he can see the larger themes."

Nancy shows a small smile. "I know you're addicted to these stories. You've got an entire room stacked to the ceiling with issues of *The Flash*, *Batman*, and *The Pink Phantom*, along with a thousand others I've never heard of. I just think that Rob would be better off reading something a little less ... well, graphic."

"OK, point taken. The next book we read together won't have any pictures at all. And minimal violence."

"Great. That's an improvement. Now, what did you do today while I was out looking for work?"

Don grunts. "Not much."

Nancy purses her lips. "You know, you can't spend every day of your retirement moping around the apartment. Since you quit the police force last month, you haven't been talking to your friends, and you've barely been outside. And don't be mad at me for saying this, but maybe you should cut back on your drinking."

Don's temper starts to flare. "Look now, you haven't exactly been a ray of sunshine either since your divorce. I've lived alone for seven years, ever since your Aunt Ruth died, God rest her soul. You're welcome in my home for as long as you want, but you need to realize that I'm making a big adjustment here. Don't tell me how to live. I've been doing it for a lot longer than you."

Nancy turns away, and Don sees that she is upset. He calms down and continues, "But OK, you're right. I'm not happy. I wasn't intending to retire from the police force this early. I just couldn't do it anymore after that terrible ... I just couldn't do it anymore." He sits down heavily on the couch.

Nancy walks up to him and grabs his hands. "I know. I know. And I've told you how grateful we are that you took us in. My deadbeat ex-husband left us with practically nothing. But things

asked Puntus how he would prefer to die. Puntus responded, "Peacefully, sire. In my bed." That night the king sent several swordsmen to the jester's bedroom to punish the punster. Puntus died piece-fully, in his bed.

will get better, I promise. I have a few leads on a job, and once I'm working again, I'll be able to help with the expenses. But we were talking about you. I just think you should get out of the apartment and do something. Interact with people. Volunteer maybe? Will you think about it? I'm kind of worried about you."

Don grunts. He's not sure where he would volunteer; he hates hospitals, and he doesn't work well with older people or with kids, except for Rob. But he does recognize that staying home doing nothing but reading comic books and graphic novels is going to wear thin eventually. It bears some thought.

Nancy sees that Don is thinking about it, and so she tactfully backs off. "OK, I'm taking Rob to his Boy Scouts meeting now. I'll pick up Chinese on the way back. How does that sound?"

"Sounds great. See you then."

Nancy and Rob leave a few moments later, and Don turns on the six o'clock news. Following stories about tensions in the Middle East, a city government sex scandal, and a possible winter storm, the attractive twenty-something news anchor smiles and purrs, "Next, we turn to our correspondent Dale Pinkerton, who has been investigating the rising incidence of drug-related violence in New York City. Dale?"

Don gets up and paces the room, then leans on the bookcase. "Thanks, Linda. Yes, drug-related violence has been mounting during the past year. Police say it has to do with an increased supply of drugs hitting the market, which has triggered competition and tension among rival gangs. Just last month, there were over 150 violent drug-related incidents within the boroughs, including nine murders. Police are overwhelmed and are finding it difficult to respond. A failed drug bust seven weeks ago resulted in four deaths, including ..."

Don interrupts the broadcast with a guttural scream, and he sucker-punches the third shelf of the seven-foot-tall bookcase, which he follows immediately with a swift kick to the bottom shelf. The bookcase will think twice before standing there like that again.

Normally, this action would have resulted only in the bruising of Don's knuckles, the broken spine of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, and the crumpling of several cheap paperback novels that were stuffed on the bottom shelf. The bookcase, deservedly punished, would have apologized for its transgression, and all would have been forgiven.

Unfortunately, however, Don fails to predict the Newtonian reaction of the pitch-black bowling ball, which had been unwisely perched on the top of the bookcase. The bowling ball is engraved with Don's first name, just above the "Storm" brand logo. The Storm crashes down upon Don's unsuspecting head, knocking him to the floor, unconscious.¹

Ω

"Don ... Don ... **Wake up!** Shake it **off!**"

Don slowly opens his eyes as the pain in the back of his head makes itself known. "Wha-what happened?" he mumbles.

"It appears that a **bowling ball** fell on your **head!** I must **caution** you to store your heavy sporting equipment someplace considerably **safer** than on the top of a seven-foot wobbly **bookcase!** What were you **thinking?!**"

Don's vision starts to clear as the pain in his head slightly ebbs. He sees a man kneeling over him wearing a red mask that covers the top half of his head.

"Oh, my God," Don exclaims. "There's cash in the bottom dresser drawer, and my wife's jewelry is in the nightstand drawer. Just don't hurt my niece and her son, OK?"

"Don't be **ridiculous**, Don. I'm one of the **good** guys, remember?"

Don's vision further improves, and he notices the large white V on Red Mask's forehead. He's wearing long blue gloves and a purple body shirt with a green exclamation mark in its center. "Wait ... it's not Halloween, is it?"

"That was over two **months** ago, Don! C'mon, **clear your head!** I'll get you a **glass of water.**"

As Red Mask heads into the kitchen, Don sits up slowly, looks around, and sees a big metal disc propped up on the sofa. It's oval, about three feet in diameter, and very colorful. In the center is a green exclamation mark on a purple circular background that is surrounded by red and white stripes.

"Admiring my **shield?**" asks Red Mask as he hands Don the water. "Know who I **am** now?"

¹ ... but luckily not cracking his skull wide open, which would have made this a very short story indeed.

Don sees the entire costume. Purple breastplate with a green exclamation mark. Horizontal red and white stripes on the midriff. Clingy yellow pants. It suddenly clicks. "Oh, good Lord."

"No, that's **incorrect!** Nor am I Jack Lord, Lord Byron, or Lord and Taylor." He pauses. "I'm **pleased** to make your acquaintance. **Captain Vehement** at your **service!**"

"Am I dead or just delusional?"

"Neither. Look, I **appreciate** that it may come as a bit of a **shock**, but I'm a **real** person, and I really am **Captain Vehement!**"

"You're saying that ... comic book characters are *real*?"

"No, **of course not,**" the Captain laughs. "Not as a rule. Just **me**. And **Worthy Woman**. And **The Pink Phantom**, of course. And **The Robin**. And that's it. Far as I know."

"What about Batman?" Don inquires.

"He's a **fictional** character! **Duh,**" says the Captain.

"Robin exists in real life, but Batman doesn't?"

"**The** Robin. Yeah. I told The Robin that he picked a really **weak** name for a **superhero**, but would he **listen?** **No!** It doesn't exactly inspire **fear and respect**, does it? So when **DC Comics** heard about The Robin's **exploits** and decided to describe some of them in a **comic book**, the writer decided that the hero needed a better moniker. Thus, he created the character **Batman** and made The Robin his **sidekick**. If you ever **meet** The Robin, be extremely careful **not** to bring that up! He's very **touchy** on the subject."

"If superheroes are real and have been fighting crime for a while now, why has no one heard about it?"

"We're **selective** about the cases we take on, and we try really hard to keep our activities **under wraps**. The **CIA** helps us keep a lid on things! It would be **impossible** to do our jobs, fighting crime, if we had to worry about **publicity** and **fans** and **product endorsements** and **archenemies** and similar **distractions**. Unfortunately, a couple comic book writers got wind of some of our exploits back in the 1940s and started writing stories about us. But nobody believed them, so we let that slide. Anyway, **none** of that comic book stuff is **true!** For example, they portray **Worthy Woman** as kind and generous. She's actually kind of a **bitch** in person! But **don't** tell her I said that."

"I don't believe this."

"It's hard to digest, I know."

"Why are you here?"

"I want to **induct** you into the SPCA!"

"What? The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals? What does that have to do with anything?"

Captain Vehement curses under his breath. "**No!** This confusion **always** happens! You're talking about the **ASPCA**. This is the **SPCA**. The **Super-Persons Confederation of America**. It's our cadre of **superheroes**. I keep **telling** them that our acronym is too **close** to the animal people's, but no one ever **listens!** It's too expensive to change all the **letterhead**, they say. Idiots!"

"Wait. You're saying you want to make me a superhero?"

"**Yes!** We've been **watching** you for a while, and we think you **have** what it **takes** to become a **bona-fide** super **crime-fighter!**"

"OK, that's enough. Bring out the hidden cameras. The joke's over."

"No, really."

"I'm a fifty-eight-year-old retired police detective from Queens who doesn't even exercise regularly—or at all, to be perfectly honest. And I don't have any superpowers."

"How do you **know** that you don't have **superpowers**? We **all** started as **normal** human beings. Our powers appeared around the time we took on our superhero roles. Look at me! I was a **frail, weak, average** guy until I was **injected** by the US government with a **serum** that tremendously **enhanced** my physique, agility, strength, and intelligence.¹ And oh, yeah, I haven't **aged** since 1940! Maybe there's a serum that will do the same for **you!**"

"Did you bring me a serum?"

"Um ... no. And I don't know that the one they injected me with exists anymore. But **maybe** it does. **Who knows?** That's all I'm saying ..."

"OK. But if you're not even sure that I have any superpowers, why me?"

"Look, the powers are **nice** to have, but being a superhero is mostly about **heart!** And we think your heart is in the right place. It's as simple as that."

"Well, even if I felt up to this, why should I do it?"

"**Three** reasons. First, you will get an incredible sense of

¹ Well, three out of four anyway.

fulfillment from helping others, not to mention how **awesome** it feels to **whomp** a bad guy! Second, it's **not boring**. Look around. Is **this** how you **intend** to spend the last phase of your **life**?" Captain Vehement pauses.

Don nods, then immediately regrets it due to the pain in his head. "And the third reason?"

"We offer **free medical coverage** for you and your **dependents!**"

"Wow. Does that include dental?"

"Yes, it does!!!"

"I'm in. The police department's retiree medical plan sucks."

Yes! Captain Vehement thinks to himself, the medical insurance clinches the deal every time.

"Very well then," the Captain says, "raise your right hand." Don does. "By the **power** vested in me in accordance with the **By-Laws** of the **Super-Person Confederation of America**, I hereby **grant** you, **Donovan Quincy**, the title of **American Superhero**, with all the **honors and privileges** pursuant thereto. Henceforth, your Superhero **moniker** shall be ... oh, you need an official name, Don. What shall it be?"

"Coyote," replies Don.

"... shall be **Don Coyote**—"

"No," interrupts Don. "Not Don Coyote. Just 'The Coyote.'"

"... shall be **The Coyote!** Congratulations and **welcome** to the team! Your **official certificate** will arrive in the mail within three to five weeks."

"Wow," exclaims Don. "So that's it?"

"Almost," responds the Captain. "We just have a short **checklist** to go through, OK? Item one: **Superpowers**. I'll put this down as '**to be determined.**' You can get back to me on that later. Item two: **Accessories**. Do you have any **objects** of importance to your **superheroness**? For example, I have my **shield**; The Robin has a **utility belt**; et cetera."

"My walking stick will come in useful in battles, I'll wager."

"Check! **Walking stick**. Item three: **Catchphrase.**"

Don thinks for a moment. "How about 'Enter The Coyote?'"

Captain Vehement opines, "That sounds a little **Bruce Lee**-

ish, but it will do. Check! Final item: **Legal Waiver and Superhero Agreement**. This simply states that the Confederation is not responsible for your death, dismemberment, poisoning, freezing, shrinking, burning, hypnosis, irradiation, decapitation, defenestration, electrification, gentrification, crucifixion, pressurization, decompression, bludgeoning, garroting, mauling, drowning, waterboarding, torture, crashing, duplication, disintegration, dissolving, quartering, or defamation ... or any other form of physical or mental unpleasantness.¹ And you agree to keep confidential the existence of the Confederation, its members, their superpowers, and all facts and circumstances relating to your superheroness, on possible penalty of death, dismemberment, poisoning, freezing, shrinking, burning, hypnosis, irradiation, decapitation, defenestration, electrification, gentrification, crucifixion, pressurization, decompression, bludgeoning, garroting, mauling, drowning, waterboarding, torture, crashing, duplication, disintegration, dissolving, quartering, or defamation. **Sign here!** And here! And here! Initial here! Thank you!"

After signing the documents, Don says, "Wait. What about the superhero costume? Do you supply that, or do I have to come up with one on my own?"

"Oh, the **costume** is not a priority. We never wear it on the job. It brings too much **attention**, you see. It's hard to maintain a **low profile** and keep your superpowers a **secret** if you enter a room wearing a **bright-red latex bodysuit!**"

"But you're wearing a costume right now!"

"Hey! That's a good use of the **exclamation point!** You're **already** sounding like one of us! But as to the **costume**, I'm only wearing it because this is an official **induction** ceremony. We also wear them for member funerals, inquisitions, weddings, and bar mitzvahs! Don't worry, you'll have **plenty** of time to consider your costume design. Here is a **form** you can fill out at your leisure. Be sure to specify any unique **requirements** such as bulletproof, inflatable, acid-repellant, radiation-proof, or drip-dry!"

"Well. Thank you for the honor. I will do my best, Captain."

¹ Feel free to write in your personal favorite methods of comic-book torture or demise HERE:

"Fantastic. **Well done!** Just a few words of **advice**, since you are a **newbie**. Don't try to take on too much at once! You need to build your skills and superpowers **slowly**. One good deed or life-saving, death-defying action per day is **good enough** for the first couple months, till you find your bearings! I'd suggest you clear out of your apartment, get some cash, and **lie low** for a while. **Avoid contact** with your **friends and family**, since they may be exposed to possible **revenge attacks** against you! The **danger** to them is **greatest** in your **early days** of crime-fighting. Once you've built your reputation among the criminal class as a **hard-ass superhero**, the evildoers will be much less likely to chance an attack on your loved ones! Well, that's about it, I think. Any **questions?**"

Don says no and shakes his head, which he immediately regrets.

"Very well! You'll probably have some questions later. If you need anything, you can leave a **message** for me at this number and I'll get back to you at the **earliest possible opportunity**. Best of **luck**, Coyote!"

Captain Vehement shakes Don's hand and gives him a business card. He then picks up his shield and exits by jumping out the window. Don rushes to the window and looks down, but the Captain is nowhere to be seen.

Don exhales and says, "Well, that was different," then goes to his bedroom and packs a suitcase. He considers leaving a note to Nancy and Rob, but he can't decide what he can write without exposing his new career, which is a no-no.¹ Finally, he leaves a note saying that he loves them but he must leave without explanation for something important. He tells them that he'll contact them as soon as he can, but he can't tell when that will be.

Don picks up his suitcase and his walking stick, opting to leave via the door rather than the window. There's no reason to be ostentatious about it, he thinks. Exit The Coyote.

¹ ... on potential penalty of death, dismemberment, poisoning, etc.

Chapter III

Tuesday Evening, January 24 (continued)

In Which Our Hero Encounters the Beautiful Dulcindi and Secures the Release of Numerous Prisoners

After leaving the apartment, The Coyote heads for Manhattan and checks into the run-down Knights Inn Hotel that offers cheap rooms by the week, takes cash, and asks no questions. He checks in under a pseudonym, Alonso Quixado, which happens to have been the name of his high school Spanish teacher.

The innkeeper is an unsavory, unshaven character named Lucas Thenardier, who excels at extracting as much cash as possible from his guests. He offers Don the "Presidential Suite," but Don refuses. He then offers to procure some female company for our hero, and Don once again turns him down, as he does the offer of male company.

When the innkeeper starts to make another suggestion, something in The Coyote's cold stare puts him off. Instead, he just says, "We hopes you enjoy your stay. If you wants to extend your

stay by an additional week, the rent is due in full the night before, by 7:00 p.m. And if you needs anything, anything at all, just call upon yours truly, the Master of the House."

The Coyote goes up to his small room and unpacks his bag. The room is intermittently illuminated by a reddish light that emanates from a neon sign across the street advertising a massage parlor,¹ which blinks on and off every three seconds. As The Coyote begins to pull the window shade down to block the light, the entire shade fixture falls off the window and lands at his feet. He wonders what the Presidential Suite is like, and how much extra it costs.

The Coyote recalls that he missed dinner tonight, and he goes back out to the street to grab something to eat. After a few minutes, he stumbles upon a bar and grill called The Beer'N'Bun, which has an alleyway entrance off a small side street.

You wouldn't call the Beer'N'Bun a dive—not without doing grievous insult to all the self-respecting dives in New York City, of which there are many. Perhaps the Beer'N'Bun might have been a dive twenty or thirty years ago, but it has gone way downhill since then. It is not a likely franchise candidate; McDonald's need not worry.

The Coyote enters and looks around. As just indicated, it's a sub-dive. The tables, chairs, and bar stools are all different sizes and designs and were probably acquired from the discard piles of other establishments. But they do share one quality: they wobble. A few of the chairs look like they would not support the weight of a mouse, and the mice wisely steer clear of those.

Behind the bar is a row of bottles of different spirits, none of which appears to have been touched within the last several decades. The entire room appears to be illuminated by a single sixty-watt bulb, making it difficult to tell in the gloom if the walls are as dirty as they appear. I will spare the reader's delicate sensibilities by declining to describe the restrooms.²

The Coyote wobbles at the bar, eating today's special: a slice

¹ ... or a restaurant. Or a nightclub. Advertise your business here. Call me at 212-555-1212 for more information.

² Don't mention it; you're welcome.

of overcooked instant pizza and a partly frozen potato knish¹ with a mug of lukewarm beer. Mo the bartender stands stoically behind the counter, counterproductively wiping some glasses with a dirty dishrag as he waxes poetic in his gravelly voice, now that he has a captive audience in the form of Don Quincy.

"Yeah, this city's gone downhill since I been workin' this bar, that's for sure. Used to be lots of people come here for a few beers and some good grub. Good people. Policemen. Firemen. Stockbrokers. Pimps. Zookeepers. They all come here and got along just fine. Except for the occasional fight between a policeman and a fireman. Or a zookeeper and a pimp. But they were gentlemanly fights, see? They'd beat the crap out of one another and then buy each other drinks the rest of the night. That's how it was back in the day. Oh, and the women. Yeah, them dames was classy, 'specially the zookeepers' wives. And folks would buy the bartender a drink all the time. Some nights I passed out from all the free drinks and a customer had to take over tending bar. That's how people were back in the day. Friendly, like. Willing to lend a hand. Not today, I can tell you. No, sir."

The Coyote looks at the barkeep and responds, "I believe there are still **fine people** living in this **fair city!** People who want to **make a difference!** Good people who just need a **helping hand!** They just need someone to **stand up** and **do what's right!** Someone to **protect** the streets and act with **dignity and honor!** Someone to **beat the crap** out of the **evildoers** and send them to a **deep, dark hole** of a **prison cell** where they will **rot** for **eternity** and **never escape!!!**"

"Uh ... yeah," replies Mo, thinking that perhaps he should not have initiated this conversation.

But The Coyote is just getting started. "The people need a **hero!** They need a **strong arm** to wield a **sword of justice** and clean up these streets! But the hero will accept **no thanks** for his **good deeds!** He shall live **in the shadows!** Where there is **injustice**, he will **fight it!** Where there is **indignity**, he shall **redress it!** Where there is **uncleanliness**, he shall wield a **queegee!**"

¹ For those of you unfamiliar with the term, a knish is a Jewish delicacy, consisting of a mashed-potato filling surrounded by deep-fried dough. Delicious! Except at the Beer'N'Bun.

Mo coughs. "No offense, but has anyone ever told you that you talk like a comic book?"

The Coyote stops to consider this. Yes, his voice has changed, he thinks. Could this be the start of one of his superpowers? He decides to experiment.

"I'LL TAKE ANOTHER BEER! PLEASE."

The bartender takes a step back. "Oh, my God! You can speak in all capital letters! How do you do that? Beer coming right up, sir." Mo tries to recall how long it took the cops to arrive the last time he dialed 911.

Well, that went well, thinks The Coyote as he looks around the room. Sitting in the corner are two other patrons, looking at him with odd expressions. When he catches their eye, they look away. Interesting. He takes another bite of his knish.

A man who appears to be about eighty years old, give or take a month or two, shuffles in. His white hair is disheveled, and his clothes look like they might have been valuable once, but are now ragged and dirty.

Mo hails a greeting. "Hello, Pops. Your usual table is ready. I'll be with you in a sec."

The man gives a little wave and sits down at a wobbly table in the far corner, where he's pretty much out of sight. He mumbles something that sounds like, "Damn Netflix," and then notices The Coyote watching him. "You must bear with me," he says. "Pray you now, forget and forgive. I am old and foolish." Mo brings him a bowl of soup and some bread and water.

When Mo returns, The Coyote asks him, "Who is that man?"

"Ah, that's a sad case, that is. Nothing to shake a spear at, I'll tell you. Homeless man. I give him some food once a day. His name is O'Leary. He was as rich as a king once, he was. But he put most of his money into Blockbuster Video stock. He thought it was the future."

"Oh, that's sad."

"That's not the worst of it. He had three daughters, see. And when he got older, he decided to divide his estate and turn it over to them. He asks them each how much they love him, and two of the daughters lay it on real thick—thick as a brick—telling him that he's the sun and the moon and the stars above. But the third one, Cordelia, she's honest, see, and she says that she loves him as a

father, no more and no less."

"I see. So **what** does he **do**?"

"He banishes her. To New Jersey."

The Coyote whistles. "**Oh, my God!**"

The bartender says, "Yeah. Tell me about it. Cruel, ain't it? Then he divides his money between the other two, thinking he'll stay with each of them in turn, until he dies."

"Let me **guess**. Once they have his **money**, it doesn't go **well** for him."

"You got it. After a couple weeks, Goneril, the daughter he's staying with, cuts his cell-phone data plan from ten gigabytes to ten megabytes."

"How **awful!**"

"Yeah, can you imagine that? He complains about it, and she throws him out. He goes to his other daughter, Regan, and she says he doesn't need a smartphone at all! Then she cancels his Platinum American Express Card."

"Oh, **cruel fate!**"

"It all went downhill from there. Regan threw him out, and he's been on the street ever since. His mind ain't what it once was, as you can see."

O'Leary says,

"Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!
 You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
 Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!
 You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
 Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
 Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
 Smite flat the thick rotundity o' th' world!
 Crack nature's molds, all germens spill at once,
 That make ingrateful man!"¹

The Coyote asks, "Does he always **talk** like **that**? And he does **know** that he's sitting **indoors**, right?"

¹ Actually written by William Shakespeare. Or, some say, by Christopher Marlowe. Or Sir Francis Bacon. Or William Stanley, 6th Earl of Derby. Or Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. Which goes to prove why copyright law is so important.

Mo responds, "Who can tell what goes on in a person's head? Sanity is just a state of mind, ain't it? But wait ... *you* are criticizing *him* for *talking funny*?"

O'Leary finishes his soup, then says:

"No, I will weep no more. In such a night
To shut me out! Pour on, I will endure.
In such a night as this! O Regan, Goneril,
Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all—
Oh, that way madness lies. Let me shun that.
No more of that."¹

With that, O'Leary stands up and leaves, with another wave to the bartender. Wow, thinks The Coyote. What a poor man. Thank God I still have all my faculties. And my ten-gigabyte data plan.

A few moments later, a blonde woman walks into the place. She sits on a wobbly chair at a wobbly table and orders a plate of scrambled eggs and bacon with a side of toast. She reads a newspaper and sips a cup of coffee as she waits. Her mascara is smeared; it looks as if she has been crying.

For some reason, The Coyote is strangely drawn to this woman and cannot take his eyes from her. Luckily, she is oblivious to his stare. Her eggs and bacon arrive, and she digs in, liberally shaking a small red bottle of hot sauce over the eggs.

Mo comes back and notices The Coyote gazing at the woman. "She does love her Tabasco sauce, that one."

Coyote turns to Mo. "Please **tell** me, barkeep, **who** is that **fair maiden**, that **vision of loveliness**?"

Mo chuckles, "Fair maiden, yeah. Ha. Cindi's a hooker, and not one of the best of their lot, as you can see. Frankly she's not very interesting, so they call her Dull Cindi."

"**Dulcindi**," The Coyote repeats. "And what is her last name?"

Mo says, "None of these girls has a last name, buddy. Not one that they share, anyways."

The Coyote takes out his cell phone and accesses the camera function, raising the camera as he speaks. "Well, if the **fairest**

¹ *ibid.*

maiden that ever lived has no last name, then I shall **provide** her with one! **Henceforth**, she shall be known as **Dulcindi del Tabasco!** I shall take this photo as a **keepsake** of her. She shall be my **goddess**, my muse, my **heroine!**" And he snaps the photo.

At the word "**heroine**," Cindi raises her head in confusion, just in time to see The Coyote taking a picture of her. Stricken with fear, she drops her fork and says, "Oh, my God, they've found me!" She jumps up, knocking her plate of eggs to the floor, grabs her coat and purse, and runs out of the room.

Mo yells, "Hey! Cindi! Stop! You ain't paid up yet!"

The Coyote jumps off his bar stool, shouting, "**Wait! Maiden of my heart!** I just wish to **speak** with you!" He tries to run after her, but he slips on the scrambled eggs and falls to the floor with a loud crash. By the time he gets up and reaches the door, Cindi is nowhere to be seen. Forlorn, he returns to his seat at the bar.

Mo is cleaning up the scrambled egg from the floor, cursing and complaining about his lost revenue.

"Hold your tongue," The Coyote tells Mo. "I will gladly pay the Lady Dulcindi's bill on her behalf."

"Well, you really are a hero, ain't you?" says Mo.

Coyote asks Mo if he knows where Dulcindi lives. Mo says, "Gee, you're really hooked on her, ain't cha? Hooked on a hooker, ha ha ha ha ha." The Coyote frowns at Mo, who quickly replies, "No, sir, I don't know where the lady lives. But if you want to find her, I'd hang around the local hotel lobbies and bars. You'll probably run into her sooner or later."

The Coyote settles his bill and wishes the bartender a good evening.

As he walks out the door, the barkeep heaves a sigh of relief. "That's one strange dude," he says to himself. "Not a bad guy, but he's got a bit of an attitude. Not a good sign in these parts. He's gonna end up in trouble, or my name ain't Mo Skzylakk."

Ω

On the way back to the Knights Inn, The Coyote comes across a van marked "Animal Control."

"**Animal Control?** What new **evil** is this?" exclaims The Coyote, who then realizes that a supervillain who can control

animals would be truly formidable. He could employ a pack of dogs as bodyguards, while using monkeys to pull off elaborate jewelry heists. Birds could be made to fly at people, causing great destruction. In fact, The Coyote recalls once seeing a documentary film about just this type of disaster befalling a quiet seaside town outside San Francisco. The birds dive-bombed a phone booth where a man was hiding and broke the glass. A bird messed up a pretty blonde woman's hair. Birds tried to enter a house through the chimney. It was horrible. The city must be protected from this evil plot, he thinks.

The Coyote looks in the window of the van and sees a number of animals locked up in cages. The villain, he thinks. You shall pay for this, evildoer. He tries to open the van, but it is locked. He decides to wait and ambush the animal controller upon his return.

After about twenty-five minutes, Mr. D'apple, a smallish man with glasses, arrives carrying a container with a cat. The Coyote waits until the van is open, then jumps out from the shadows and says, "**Enter The Coyote! Hold, Villain.** Slowly place the **kitty** on the **ground** and **put your hands in the air!**"

Oh, no, thinks Mr. D'apple. A mugger. Not again.

The evil animal controller known as D'apple does as The Coyote requests and says, "Look, I don't have much money, but you can take whatever I have. Just don't shoot."

"I **don't intend** to **shoot** you, and I don't **want** your **money**, evil one! I am **here** for the **animals!**"

Oh, no, thinks Mr. D'apple. An animal-rights activist. Not again. He'd rather be mugged.

"Listen, what we do with these animals is for their own good. They're strays. They don't get enough food, and they can spread rabies and other diseases."

"Just because you **feed** them **doesn't** give you the **right** to take over their little **puppy** minds to force them to do your **evil bidding!**"

Oh, no, thinks Mr. D'apple. A crazy person. Not again. He'd rather be assaulted by an animal-rights activist.

"**Open** the cages," demands The Coyote.

"I can't do that. Some of these animals are starving, and some are dangerous. And some are dangerous because they're starving."

"**OPEN THE CAGES!**" repeats The Coyote.

Mr. D'apple wonders how this man is able to speak in all capital letters. Then he notices that the assailant doesn't have a gun. But he does have a stick. A stick's good enough for me, Mr. D'apple thinks. I'll catch more animals tomorrow. He opens the cages, and the animals run out. One particularly frisky beagle tries to make friends with The Coyote's leg. The Coyote shakes him off and waits until the animals have all gone.

"I hope you're proud of yourself," says Mr. D'apple.

"Well, **yes**, actually I **am**," replies The Coyote. "The **prisoners** have been **released**, and your plan of world domination is **foiled**, at least for now. A good day's **work**, if I do say!"

"World domination, yeah. I'm just trying to do my job and follow orders."

"Oh, so you are just an **underling**. I have no interest in wasting time on **minions**. You may go. Tell your **evil master** that he should leave this city **forthwith!** For if he doesn't, **The Coyote** shall make him **pay!**"

"There are no coyotes in New York City. Except perhaps at the zoo."

"Did you not **hear** me, underling? **The Coyote!** Capital **T**. Capital **C**. The Coyote is **I**."

Truly looney tunes, thinks Mr. D'apple. Time to exit stage left. "Yes, sir, Mr. Coyote. I'll tell him."

"**Go** then!" The Coyote turns and walks away, satisfied by a promising first day.

Chapter III

Tuesday Evening, January 24 (continued)

Wherein Our Hero Defends a Lady's Honor and Makes a Wise Purchasing Decision

The Coyote returns to the Knights Inn, flush with his decisive victory over the evil animal controller's henchman. As he walks toward the elevator, a young woman in an exceedingly short skirt glides up to him and takes hold of his arm. "Hi, honey, I'm Ginger. Would you like a date tonight?"

The Coyote stops and addresses the woman thusly: "My dear **madam**, although I **appreciate** your kind offer, I must respectfully **decline!** My **heart and soul** are committed to the **beauteous** Dulcindi del Tabasco, who is my **lady**, my **muse**, my **heroine!**"

"That's nice, honey, but I can score you some heroin too, if that's what you're into. I know a guy who knows a guy. But you should be careful with that stuff, you know? It's bad for your heart, and you're pretty old, sweetie. I'm just saying."

"Thank you, but I have **no need** of chemical stimulants, which, moreover, are **illegal** substances and highly **dangerous**. Indeed, it is my sworn **duty** to **fight** against the use and

distribution of illegal narcotics, and I would **strongly** encourage you, young woman, to **avoid** such drugs and the people who deal in them! **Ignore** my warning at your **peril!**"

"Oh, no. Wait ... are you a cop?"

"No, I am no **longer** employed by any branch of the **law**. But as an individual concerned **citizen**, it is my **mission** to fight evil **wherever** it may be found! I dedicate my quest for **righteousness** to my lady patron, **Dulcindi** the beautiful!"

"Dull Cindi? Your lady is Dull Cindi? I know that chick."

Excited, The Coyote grabs the woman by the shoulders. "You know my **Dulcindi**? Do you know where I can **find** her? I must speak with her and express my **undying love** and **dedication!**"

"Um ... right. I'm pretty sure that a hundred-dollar bill will do that just fine, as far as Cindi's concerned. But no, I don't know where to find her. In fact, I haven't seen her for a couple weeks. Now take your hands off me."

The Coyote releases her shoulders and looks despondent.

When Ginger sees the look on his face, she adds, "But wait a minute. You might try the Hotel Mysterio. She likes to take clients there as I recall."

"The **Hotel Mysterio!** I shall look there. I am much **obliged** to you, my **lady**," responds The Coyote, and he lifts her hand to his lips.

"Hey, no sampling the merchandise, honey. If you're that much obliged, why don't you go on a date with me? It'll be fun, I promise."

"I'm **sorry**. I must remain **chaste!** I only have eyes for **Dulcindi.**"

"One of her regulars. OK. But I've never seen such loyalty in a client before, much less one of Dull Cindi's. What did you say you did for a living?"

The Coyote stands erect and intones, "I take no **compensation** for my work as a private **crime**-fighter. **Captain Vehement** himself came to my apartment and commissioned me to become a **superhero**. My mission is to **right wrongs** and **bring justice** to this fair city! Where the helpless are **imprisoned**, I bring **freedom!** Where the unfortunate are in **pain**, I bring **comfort!** Where the **evil** ply their trade, I bring **vengeance!** I am the **trickster!** I can speak in **CAPITAL** letters! I am ... **The Coyote!**"

Ginger doubles over with laughter, then looks at him. When she sees The Coyote's stern expression and his arms crossed against his chest, Ginger realizes this man is not joking. She says, "You're ... serious? Good luck with that, honey. Forget about the date. I don't do psychos." She heads over to the desk and starts talking to Lucas Thenardier, the innkeeper. They look over at The Coyote, then laugh.

The Coyote wonders if he overstepped his bounds just a little. He is supposed to be quiet about his superhero activities, after all. Oh well, he thinks.

Ω

[Lights dim on the lobby area of the Knights Inn, and lights go up in the bar, Stage Left. The bar is angled away from the theater audience, and there is a good view of the characters who will be seated there. There are six wooden barstools. Across from the bar are several tables and chairs, all unoccupied. A flute plays a haunting, soulful melody. A bartender stands behind the counter, wiping glasses. He looks to be about thirty years old, moderately handsome, and is dressed in a dark suit and a ruffled white shirt. The Coyote stands at the entrance to the lobby, on the right.]

Willy, a salesman in his late fifties, limps onto the stage from the left. He is dressed in a plain, tan-colored suit that's a little worn. He wears a white shirt with a garish yellow tie. One of his pant legs is ripped and muddy. He carries a briefcase in his hand. Willy speaks in a commanding voice, but there is a bit of uncertainty underneath, as if he is covering up his insecurity by trying to sound assured. He moves over to the hotel bar, takes a seat, and calls to the bartender.]

WILLY: Service, please!

BARTENDER: Good evening, sir.

WILLY: What a night! It's going to be the death of me, I tell you. If I don't get a drink real quick, you're going to have the death of a salesman on your hands, friend. Gimme a double scotch on the rocks and some Band-Aids, if you got 'em. Damn dog just bit me as I was walking down the street minding my own business. Why don't people lock those things up, I'd like to know. Doesn't the city ever take care of this problem?

[Interested, The Coyote walks over to the bar and sits two stools away from Willy.]

COYOTE: A **Diet Coke**,¹ please.

BARTENDER: Coming right up, sir.

[The bartender brings the drinks.]

BARTENDER: I'm sorry, sir. I don't seem to have any Band-Aids. Shall I have the concierge look for some?

WILLY: What? Damn. No, don't bother. I'll take care of it later. *[turns to The Coyote]* Yeah, what if this dog had rabies or something? I probably should head over to the hospital and get checked out. Yeah, that's what I'll do after a few drinks to calm my nerves. Damn dog. It's been a weird night. Just before that, these two hulking guys stopped me on the street and showed me a picture of some blonde. Asked me if I've seen her. I says no and they scowl like they don't believe me, then they walk off. Scary guys. It all goes to show ya. You can't be too careful. That's why everyone should have a life insurance policy. Cause you never know what's going to happen. One day, everything's fine and dandy. Next day, you're hit by a bus, bitten by a rabid dog, or knifed by two gorillas in an alleyway.

COYOTE: Or **frozen solid** by an **evil freeze ray!**

WILLY *(looks at The Coyote quizzically)*: A freeze ray. Yeah. Can't be too careful. *[He holds out his hand. They shake.]* Glad to meet you. My name's Willy. Willy Loneman.

COYOTE: *[pauses a moment]* Mine's Alonso. Alonso Quixado. At your **service!** Tell me about those **two men**. Who **were** they, and **why** were they looking for the **blonde woman?**

WILLY: No earthly idea. They didn't introduce themselves and didn't explain nothin'. But as they were walking away, I heard one of 'em say to the other, "It's like she fell into a black hole." And the other guy says, "That's highly improbable since a black hole large enough to draw in a human body would have sufficient gravity to attract many more objects. Soon it would collect enough mass to draw in cars and buildings and the like, and it would eventually mean the end of life on this planet." And the first guy says, "So probably not a black hole then." And the second guy says, "We should hope not." Then they turned the corner and I

¹ The author did not receive any monetary compensation for mentioning Diet Coke, but he would be open to such a proposal. Indeed, if there is a second publishing of this novel, the term "Diet Coke" could easily be changed to "Diet Pepsi" or any other branded beverage for that matter. Firms seeking placement may call the author at 212-555-1212.

couldn't hear no more.

COYOTE: That is **odd**.

WILLY: Yeah. Anyway, you never know what's going to happen to you. That's my point. What if you died tomorrow? Who would pay off your debts? Who would care for your loved ones? Do you have loved ones, Alonso?

COYOTE: **Yes! My niece! And her son!**

WILLY: That's good. Me too. I have a lovely wife named Lindy, and two sons, Buff and Hoppy.

COYOTE (*stares at Willy*): You named your sons "**Buff**" and "**Hoppy**"? **Seriously?** Are your sons **rabbits**, by any chance?

WILLY (*grimaces and coughs*): No, they ain't rabbits, smart guy! But I know what you mean. Their mother picked the names. They run in her family. She's from Iowa. Oh, well, never mind. They're good kids. Buff plays football in high school. He's a star, very well-liked. And that's what's important in this life, I can tell you. Being liked. Take me, for example. I'm well-liked. I travel the road. Up to New England. And everywhere I go, people know me and like me. "Good ol' Billy," they say.

COYOTE: That must be very **gratifying!**

WILLY: You bet it is. Yessiree. It's important to be liked, for sure. But, of course, a little luck is always a good thing too. Take my brother Glen, for example. He went off to Alaska and Africa and found a gold mine. Made a fortune, yes sir.

[Lights in bar partially dim, and lights come up on Glen, Stage Right. He is dressed in a safari suit and has a white beard. He speaks with authority. It is obvious from the lighting that Glen is not really there. He is a memory of Willy's.]

GLEN: William, when I entered the jungle, I was seventeen years old. And when I came out, I was twenty-one. And by God, I was rich!

[Lights goes out on Glen and come up on the bar.]

WILLY: Anyway, most of us can't be as lucky as my brother Glen. And our loved ones, they need to be provided for. Say I die in a car crash, for example. Or by carbon-monoxide poisoning. They would need some support. And that's where life insurance comes in. You got any life insurance, Alonso?

COYOTE (*looking like he was wishing that he'd gone straight to bed tonight*): Uh ... no.

WILLY: Then it's your lucky day! 'Cause I just happen to be

the top salesman for The Acme Insurance Corporation. Our motto is: "If you drop dead, we keep your kids fed." Pretty catchy, huh? For just a few dollars a week, you can be the proud owner of a million-dollar life insurance policy, which will be paid out to your loved ones in the unfortunate event of your untimely demise."¹

COYOTE (*uncomfortable*): Uh ... perhaps I'll think about it.

WILLY: Excellent. In that case, let me just take a quick minute to explain a few things about the policy.

[The Coyote looks skyward as Willy opens his briefcase. Lights down on bar. Lights up on lobby.]

Ω

Two hours later, at roughly 3:00 a.m., The Coyote is the proud owner of a million-dollar life insurance policy, which will be paid out to his niece and her son in the unfortunate event of his untimely demise.²

As The Coyote walks toward the elevator, he sees that his friend Ginger is now chatting with another man, asking him for a date. However, this man obviously lacks the tact and courtesy that The Coyote exhibited during his conversation with the mini-skirted Ginger. Moreover, the man is clearly inebriated and excitable. The Coyote stands off to the side and listens.

"So, honey, you ready for that date?" Ginger asks, hanging on the man's arm.

"How much we talkin', baby?" slurs the man.

"How much you got, sugar? And it depends on what you want."

"Howzah bout a little kiss first, to sees if I like it?"

Off to the side, The Coyote grows agitated.

"No sampling the merchandise before the purchase, honey."

"Just a little feel first." The man's hands start groping. Ginger squirms and The Coyote steps out of the shadows.

"**Enter The Coyote! Unhand** that lady, you **cad!**" says The Coyote.

¹ Payout invalidated in the event of suicide, accidental death, murder, or death by natural causes.

² For an extra \$1.50 a week, The Coyote added a rider that allows for payment in the event of permanent immobilization by freeze ray.

"Oh, dear lord," moans Ginger.

"Who the hell are you?" shouts the man.

"I am **The Coyote!** I fight for the **oppressed!** I stand for **justice!** I defend the **honor** of ladies in distress! **Remove** your hands from that **good lady** this **instant!**"

"Good lady? Are you mad? She ain't no lady—she's just a cheap hooker!"

"**Enough!** You have **besmirched** the honor of this lady for too long! **Out with you,** and do **not** return!" The Coyote brandishes his walking stick and begins thrashing the drunken belligerent, who, like most cowards, turns and runs into the street at the first sign of a real fight.

"**There!** Serves you **right,** you **scoundrel,** you **ragamuffin,** you **scallywag!**"

The Coyote is able to relish his victory for only a moment before Ginger attacks him with her purse, shouting, "You idiot! You moron! That was my meal ticket, you oaf!" She pounds him until he drops to the floor, shocked and confused as to why his chivalry is not appreciated. Ginger walks off as The Coyote gets up, dusts himself off, and looks at the innkeeper, who is examining him with interest.

"I bid you **good night,** good sir," says The Coyote, and he takes the elevator up to his room.

Dear Reader,

If you enjoyed this excerpt, please consider purchasing the entire book. Available now on Amazon.

If you didn't, thanks for reading this far!

Regards,

Pete Simons