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A Day With Lazlo

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Lazlo is wearing his Fourth of July finery: two miniature American flags hanging limply from thin dowels thrust through his rib cage. I have positioned Lazlo--a sixteenth scale replica of a vulture skeleton constructed of ivory colored Fischer-Price plastic--on the top shelf of the seasonal literary works display which the library director insists be placed next to the reference desk where I work. Sandwiched between *The Indigenous Peoples' History of America* and an annotated copy of the Declaration of Independence, Lazlo suffers my monthly theming of his bones with calm, almost Buddha-like serenity, but secretly I think he enjoys the attention.

The reference desk phone rings. I throw Lazlo a quick salute before answering "County Library Reference Desk. Is this the party to whom I am speaking?" in my best Ernestine the Telephone Operator impersonation.

"How much would it cost me to ship a dead armadillo to that sissy pinko commie Joe Biden?" demands a voice that unwillingly reminds me of pea gravel, sphagnum moss, and maple syrup.

It is Mr. MAGA (not his real name of course), who often calls with this sort of question. I have never met him, but that does not stop my imagination from throwing up an all too vivid picture of a forty-seven year old white man, unshaven, age-spotted skull with thinning, unkempt gray hair hidden under a bright red MAGA baseball cap, barbecue sauce-stained muscle shirt that struggles to contain a lovingly cultivated beer belly, camouflage pants with numerous overstuffed pockets, cheap work boots from Payless.

I suspect he is calling from the bunker he began building in his basement when Obama first took office, but he could be at the Starbucks next door--one never knows.

"Would that be Joe Biden, President Elect of the United States?" I ask sweetly.

"Yeah, him. Who the hell else would it be?"

"Just making sure," I say. "And would that be a taxidermied armadillo?"

"Taxi-what?"

"Taxidermied. You know: stuffed and mounted."

"Stuffed? No! It's roadkill: I ran over it this morning coming home from the Make American Great for Guns rally."

"I see," I said, wishing otherwise. "And how much does this dead armadillo weigh?"

"Let's see." I hear scrapping, a grunt, a liquid plop. "Maybe-- twenty pounds?"

"One moment." I set the receiver down, sip my coffee. Play a game of solitaire on my phone. Transcribe the letters d, u, m, b, a, s, s into their numerical counterparts.

Judging that just enough time has passed to thoroughly irritate Mr. MAGA, but not so much that he has hung up, I pick up the receiver and say: "That would be four hundred twenty one million, one hundred thirty two thousand, one hundred nineteen dollars and nineteen cents. That includes packing; shipping and handling; biohazard labeling, license, and insurance; certified delivery; a biohazard suit for the delivery person, clean van rental, and liquid nitrogen refrigerant; tariffs and fees; hazard pay and bribes for the various inspectors. And--" A wink at Lazlo. "A greeting card with a personalized message."

I can almost hear Mr. MAGA's eyes popping. "Damn it, I don't have that kind of money!" he shouts, then slams the receiver down.

"Have a nice day," I say to the dial tone.

I pull out a fat notebook labeled "Odd Requests Volume 3," record a summary of Mr. MAGA's request and my response. Only a few pages of the notebook remain blank, so I fill out a requisition for another notebook. Someday I will compile these notebooks into self-published book, which I will then inflict autographed copies upon all of the people who so generously furnished me material.

Mr. MAGA's barbecue-stained muscle shirt sticks with me. My stomach growls discretely to remind me it is almost lunch time. I look at Lazlo, resplendent in his Americana. "Lazlo, for August I'm going to dress you in a pink sun visor, Ray-Ban knockoffs, 'Kiss the Cook' apron, tongs and spatula, and flank you with *Diet For A Small Planet* and *German Flamethrower Pioneers of World War I.* What do you think?"

Lazlo's poker face gives nothing away, but I think he approves.