

# *Ask Kierkegaard*

## **by Fiberglass**

The creature moving toward us appeared to be human at first. It was *dressed* like one anyway, although its chocolate-brown turtleneck and tan corduroy slacks were clearly the products of a tackier time. It had emerged, rather casually, from the bushes in front of the cafeteria as we passed.

It was, truth be told, this display of peculiar nonchalance that struck me. It could have been a coincidence that it just happened to come out of the foliage at that particular time, and I admit that that would have greatly appealed to me because I like the notion of a lackadaisical universe. But I had serious doubts.

When it reached the sidewalk, it extended its left hand in a gesture that one might expect to see from an under-trained competitor who has fallen behind in a footrace and, in a state of near-exhaustion, is imploring his friends to “wait up.” This engendered within me a sense of vague dread, not only because of the unsettling nature of the situation but also because I had been that “competitor” on more than one occasion. My companion, who had been lost in his own thoughts, had not observed what was going on.

“Hey, Frank?”

“Yeah?”

“Who’s that guy?” I indicated with a quick backwards nod.

He glanced back. “Couldn’t say.”

“Does he look strange to you?”

“Sort of. It doesn’t look like he has any eyes. I mean, there are sockets, but there doesn’t appear to be anything in them. Maybe it’s just the lighting.”

“He has a lot of facial scars, too.”

“Maybe he was in an accident. Or maybe he’s one of those extreme-body-modification enthusiasts.”

“I don’t know, but he’s creeping me out.”

“*Everyone* creeps *me* out these days.”

“Do *I* creep you out?”

“No exceptions, man.”

“That’s reasonable.” I looked over my shoulder again. The creature was still behind us, but it hadn’t gotten any closer. “You know what? *Super Mario World* is a great game, but I’ve always hated Yoshi.”

“What are you talking about? *Everyone* loves Yoshi.”

“Unlikely. You work for the Pew Research Center or something?”

“I wish. They wouldn't hire me on account of my flat feet.”

“I'm not convinced that that's actually a thing.”

“In any event, what could you possibly have against Yoshi? He's adorable.”

“That's part of the problem. He's too cute. The main issue, though, is that Mario doesn't need a mount. It's ridiculous. I've often wondered whether you can make it through the game without using him.”

“Have you tried?”

“To be honest, I've never had many opportunities to play it. My dad refused to buy another console after the NES.”

“I know what you mean. *My* dad used to go into clock stores and say to the salespeople, ‘This timepiece says 5:30, but what time is it *really?*’ But I’m not sure you’re in a position to be complaining. You'd need to be facing west with your arms akimbo and toes pointing toward the nearest Service Merchandise. Besides, what good is there in having such a strong opinion about something like that?”

“What good is there in *anything?*”

“You’re taking Philosophy this semester, aren’t you?”

“Two semesters ago.”

“Doesn’t sound like you paid attention.”

“I tried to, but the professor was absent a lot, and she liked to leave her toenail clippings in charge. She’d just pile them up on the desk. Suffice it to say that the lectures lacked polish.”

Frank turned his eyes to the side. “You think he’s following us?”

“It’s hard to say at this juncture. When we reach the corner, let’s take a left and see what he does.”

“Eating a tongue is kind of like eating a fruit pie.”

“What?”

“Don’t ask me. Ask Soren Kierkegaard. He’s the one who said it.”

“Why did *you* say it?”

“I don’t know. The philosophy thing, I guess.”

“I’d gladly ask him. Where does he hang out these days?”

“I saw him at a boat show a couple of weekends ago. At least I *think* it was him.”

“The one that was at the mall?”

“Yeah. It’s nice to be able to grab a Hot Dog on a Stick while gazing at nautical vessels in a non-maritime setting. Don’t you just love the hats those guys wear?”

“Sailors?”

“No, the Hot Dog on a Stick employees.”

“I can say with complete conviction that I’d walk a mile across hot coals to get one of those hats.”

“You could just get a job there instead.”

“That’s where I’d draw the line.”

We took a left at the corner, walked twenty yards or so, and stopped next to a copse of trees. Sure enough, the creature followed right behind us. At this point I was starting to get really anxious, and I had no idea how to contact the authorities. I wasn’t even sure that there *were* any authorities.

Should we try to lose it or confront it?

“Hey,” Frank said, waving at the thing. He’d made the decision for us.

I gasped. “What are you *doing*?”

He shrugged. "I typically try to avoid using the direct approach, but I figured it might work in this case."

The creature eased to a stop three feet from us. It still had its hand out. I could now see that its skin was tanned like leather, misshapen, and stitched together. Its eyes were, in fact, missing. It didn't appear that it had any teeth, either; its nostrils were free of cilia or dried mucus, but, oddly, it did have a handlebar moustache. Its hair was long, black, and shaggy and hung from its scalp in lifeless waves, like a radio frequency that had been lost on the far side of the dial. Its fingernails were yellow and cracked, and the lines on its extended palm were dark and deep. It was, by all appearances, nothing more than a shell of a human being, a macabre balloon filled with inscrutability.

"Is there something we can do for you?" Frank asked.

The thing's head moved slightly, and its hand retracted to its side, forming a fist. I took a step back, fearful of what might happen next, but Frank kept his position. The sun was beginning to set, and a slight breeze stirred the creature's vestments, which were a few sizes too large for its wispy frame.

"Maybe it thinks we're crows," I offered.

Frank gave me a puzzled look. "You think it's a scarecrow?"

"Maybe."

"We don't look anything like crows."

"No eyes, dude."

He considered this. "Besides, scarecrows don't *pursue* crows. They frighten them away, or at least they're supposed to. Plain and simple. Once they're gone, they don't give them any more thought."

"Well, most of them aren't ambulatory."

"Not in this dimension."

Just then, a strange sound, a kind of exaggerated whooshing, came from behind a nearby hillock. Frank and I turned to look, and a large, oddly shaped figure appeared in silhouette. As it moved into view, it became clear that it was a dinosaur.

The creature moved enthusiastically toward it, reaching into the pocket of its pants and producing a shiny, red apple. The dinosaur's long tongue shot out and seized the fruit, and the giant lizard lowered itself to the ground. A pair of white, birdlike wings slowly appeared from

within the lizard's shoulders. The creature mounted the dinosaur's back, which was outfitted with a fine-looking saddle, and shook the reins.

The dinosaur and its grotesque rider rose into the air and disappeared into the crepuscule. Whatever the creature had wanted from us had clearly been forgotten.

Frank smiled, pulled a cigarette out of the pack in his pocket, and pointed it toward the sky. "Does this change your opinion?"

"Not really, no."