

What's in a name 2 - Pastime Paradise.

MY NAME is fearsome, Dr. Blood thought, and some day it will be world famous. It wasn't the name his mother gave him; it was the name he gave himself. No one would mess with someone named Dr. Blood. He imagined being a doctor, and blood was what doctors dealt with. The name sounded right, like a dentist named Dr. Smiley. Like his shop teacher Mr. Wood.

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Painting was a pastime of Codell's when he was young, but he was shy about it. He had a brown paper bag to carry his paint; it passed for a lunch.

With a swagger, Codell got off the Detroit city bus downtown. Some store doors yawned open, some remained closed behind metal fencing. The oblique morning sunshine diffused through the haze and heralded another blazing afternoon.

Codell headed for the Greyhound depot. It covered a block. The sleek coaches entered at one end of the bus garage and departed from the other. Codell approached the garage exit. Inside, the behemoths were parked diagonally, some rumbling, some silent.

A security guard sat on a stool at the garage exit. A coach rolled out, its driver and the guard exchanging waves. Codell strode into the garage as if he belonged there.

"Hey! Hey kid, you can't come in here."

"Pardon me, sir. Is this the Greyhound station?"

“Yes, it’s the exit for buses. You have to go through the front for tickets. Go left and then to the end of the block.”

“I’m sorry, sir, where?” Codell walked to the guard and read his badge: Carl Wickman.

“Around the corner. Left.”

“Uhhh . . . which way is left?”

“What are you, stupid, boy?! You don’t know which way ‘left’ is?” Carl Wickman motioned with his arm like a swooping bird and jerked his head to the left. “Left!”

Oh, yes, sir; thank you, sir.” Codell retreated out and around the corner, walked the length of the block, entered the terminal, and located the depot’s offices. He pulled open the office door and took a few steps, his head barely above a tall counter before him. The door bumped closed, shutting out the terminal hub-bub.

A woman behind the counter stood to see him. “May I help you? Are you lost?”

“No, Ma’am.” He held up his brown bag. “My dad forgot his lunch, he works in the garage. Carl Wickman. Can I bring it to him?”

“You’re Carl Wickman’s boy? I didn’t know! You can’t go in the garage, sweetie, but I can make sure he gets it.” She held her hand out.

“Is there a way I can give it to him myself? So I can surprise him?”

“As easy as you said it, honey. That will be fun.” She picked up a microphone and pressed a button on its base. “Carl Wickman to the front office,” her voice echoed through the building. “Carl Wickman, front office.”

“Thank you, Ma’am.” Codell picked up an old magazine. The woman sat down. Neither could see the other above the counter. Codell quietly put down the magazine, crouched, cracked the door open, and squeezed out. A few minutes later, Carl Wickman came in. “You paged me?”

“Your son’s here with your lunch! He’s the most polite young man - ”

“What? I don’t have a son.”

The woman stood up, puzzled. “He was sitting right there.”

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By the time Carl Wickman got back to his security station, Codell was inside the garage. He darted between two parked buses. In the few feet separating the buses, he took a can of cherry red spray paint out of his paper bag and popped off the cap.

From inside the bus station where passengers waited, through large windows, light spilled into the garage. Some passengers sat; some wandered about. Ensnared in the shadows between two buses, Codell’s heart pounded. He didn’t dare to shake the can; it would be too loud. He jammed his forefinger down. The nozzle spewed red.

The first letter on the Greyhound took shape in red slashes. Codell rushed each stroke, down and right, right and down. The hiss of the nozzle echoed in the confine between the two buses. By the time he had painted the **B**, the first **D** had started to

drip. Codell cursed the imperfections but kept painting, too hurried to correct any flaws.

As Codell finished the first **L**, footsteps fell in the garage and fell nearer to him. He flattened on the concrete floor and shimmied under the bus. Two voices talked about air conditioning and moved past. Dr. Blood slid back out from under the bus and resumed: **O**. Each letter brought him closer to the windows and the passengers' tattle-tale eyes. He worked closer and closer, perilously close. When he finished the final **D**, he was only thirty feet from full light. He admired his completed name: **DR BLOOD**.

He dropped again to the garage floor and wriggled to the other side of the bus, leaving the paint can behind. From there, he walked to the garage entrance, his pounding pulse betraying his nonchalance. "Hi!" he said exuberantly to the entrance guard.

Dr. Blood needed to get home, but first he circled around the Greyhound building to the exit where Carl Wickman sat eating a sandwich, not far from an empty four wheeled luggage cart. Dr. Blood skipped to the cart and leaped on, the cart clattering, his inertia sailing him by Carl Wickman.

"Hey, Dad!" Dr. Blood said. "How's your lunch?"

"What? YOU!" Dr. Blood hopped off the cart and pushed it as fast as he could out the exit, Carl Wickman in pursuit. The cart careened on the sidewalk and a pedestrian, jeopardized by the erratic course, jumped out of the way. The cart bounced against the depot wall. Carl Wickman, half eaten sandwich in hand, gained ground.

“HEY! HEY!” he shouted, waving his sandwich, and the cart vaulted the sidewalk curb, skating in front of a car and the car lurched to a halt, horn blowing, and Dr. Blood tried to stop but the forward motion pulled him farther into the street and collided against the front tire of a second car. It screeched to a halt, driver wide eyed, unaware as to who or what she had hit or been hit by. Dr. Blood abandoned the cart and ran. Carl Wickman dropped his sandwich, swore, and dashed after the cart. Traffic stopped in both directions, horns sounding in urban cacophony. The driver of the car got out and started a Chinese fire drill, searching for damage or, for all she knew, a body.

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Dr. Blood grinned all the way home. The Greyhound would take his name all over the country. He would be famous. A jet flew far above, and he pictured his name on the side, carrying him to the whole world. He would have to learn how to paint DR BLOOD in other languages - Chinese, Mexican, Canadian.

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“Pastime Paradise” title taken from Stevie Wonder’s song of the same name.