

The Horrible Plan of Horace Pickle

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SPECIAL SNEAK PEEK

ACT I: Minion Wanted

Prologue

Forty feet above the factory floor, Horace stood looking out the windows that lined the East wall. He watched the sun rise and thought: *There's not much you can do with a family name like Pickle. It conjures only particular things, most of which deal with cucumbers and they are not the most elegant and noble of vegetables. In fact, having a name associated with cucumbers--and therefore the color green--really does not do wonders for your prospects. Of course, cucumbers are not the only thing you can pickle. Beets are an option, as are eggs. Depending on where in the world you are you may also find pickled eggplant, carrot, turnip, onions, cabbage, dates, peppers, and even squid. There's an awful lot that you can pickle but it seems, no matter where you go, the main thought people have towards the word 'pickle' is that of cucumbers... Large or small, sliced, diced, or whole, cucumbers are it.*

As he walked across the catwalk towards the old foreman's office, he tapped erratically on the railing. The echo shivered throughout the building.

He knew the name Pickle actually originated in the early 1400's. Back then it referred to "a spicy sauce or gravy served with meat or fowl," as the dictionary today will explain.

Naturally the definition has changed over time and now pickle can even refer to the cleaning of stainless steel with chemical baths.

No matter how you looked at it, Pickle was not a very good name. What could go with it? Bob Pickle? Anne Pickle? Jack Pickle? Actually, those names weren't all that bad. Certainly not as bad as his name: Horace Pickle.

He pushed open the door and sat down at his desk. Horace Pickle was not what many people would refer to as one of the 'good guys'. He was very much, in fact, a villain. Horace had many of the classic aspects and he had worked long and hard to cultivate them. A tall, gaunt man with hair that he did not wash too often, Horace oozed bitterness. He tried to cover it up when he went out, but the black trench coat and heavy boots only went so far, especially during the summer. The goggles he wore all the time, even indoors. Horace insisted his eyes were light sensitive, so he had for a long time worn sun glasses until one day he saw the most incredible pair of goggles on TV. A quick trip to the internet and he had discovered glacier glasses. Now he never took them off. Dressed thus, he would skulk through the streets any time he had to run an errand, to the post office, to the book store, to the pet store, or to the grocery store.

Yes, Horace skulked; many years of being picked on and mocked weighed his shoulders down with anger and angst. Horace hated his name and so did everyone else. But they couldn't just let him go in peace; they had to let him know how much they hated his name. Every time he used his credit card someone would say "Really? Your name is Horace Pickle?" or "Wow, I'm sorry," or occasionally give a wordless look of disgust. This was his whole life, played out with a name that smelled like rotten eggs.

And like so many evil master minds before him, he turned those things that plagued his existence into fuel to drive him forward. Here was a man who had just achieved his fifth graduate degree and, only a week ago, turned twenty-nine. This is only to say that Horace is very smart. He refused to allow himself the title of genius--he had seen what happened to those kinds--but all the same he had achieved a lot.

However, turning twenty-nine had done something. One year more and he would be thirty. Oh, there was nothing wrong with that, plenty of evil geniuses started successful careers in their thirties. *Besides*, Horace chided himself, *I am not a genius*. Still, he felt something that had not been there before; a new kind of drive, a sense of time slipping by.

Should he pursue a PhD? Five graduate degrees was a lot and certainly he knew enough to pursue a more specialized field of study. But no, that course was not for him. The slavery of post-graduate work was too confining. He needed to get out there and do something for himself.

Horace had realized earlier in the week that this feeling was coming most often when doing his least favorite chore: going to the grocery store. It wasn't that he hated grocery stores; not any more anyway. He used to hate them with all the passion he could muster. For years he considered them the source of all that was wrong in the world. But then a few years ago he gave it some serious consideration and decided that grocery stores were but pawns in the world and no more to blame than he was. After all, they were just companies trying to make money by filling a need.

Horace didn't take issue with that in particular. Rather, a specific food was the object of his hate, a food that he thought of now as he reached into the desk drawer and pulled out a neatly

kept notebook. This food drove him to fill the notebook with ideas and schematics. A food that inspired such ire in him that it surpassed every other slander and insult: Mashed potatoes.

Oh, how he hated mashed potatoes. They were the ultimate betrayal of nature, a cruel trick that some sick-minded pervert had conjured from the depths of his base and twisted brain. To take something so pure and awesome as a potato, a root of such magnificence and grandeur, then to beat it to a pulp, mix it with dairy in various forms--salted, churned, left to mold and ferment, to spoon it like some gruel for the old and crippled. It was a travesty, performed upon a beautiful source of nutrition for absolutely no reason other than it was how God did not want it. Heresy was not a far cry from the acts perpetrated on this fantastic tuber. Oh god, how Horace Pickle hated mashed potatoes... but now he had a plan.