

The Life and Death of Filbert, the Low-Down, No-Account Biker

By Kenn Hartmann

Filbert didn't like me from get. We met at one of those industrial league football games at a public park in the factory district.

I said, "U-oudda-bounds!"

He argued he was in.

"No u-bobble-dit."

"You need glasses." No argument there. I probably didn't make the best football referee but Filbert didn't make the best player.

We got into a tangle. Filbert wasn't a fighter, but loved to tangle. If you threw a fist, Filbert threw a chair. He was fond of improvising and showed no adversity to choke holds, eye gouges or knee kicks to the groin. Nothing fancy, just down and dirty horseplay as Filbert called it. Once the brawl commenced, we brawled. We brawled over the last hit of weed. I punched him and he hit me with a chair and instituted a chokehold into the fray and I gasped, "Who fights over weed?" We brawled over the black and white, his skin was black and mine was white. We crashed through tables and chairs and broke up the joint until too exhausted to continue. "You call this horseplay?"

He fantasized he had been Bass Reeves in another life. "Bass Reeves man, legendary black man, a cowboy, a sheriff, a lawman." I tried to point out in his current reincarnation he was more of an outlaw, but it was pointless to distract Filbert from his passionate reverie.

When Filbert and I hit Sturgis, South Dakota, he strutted around town like a black Billy the Kid, a quirky, gangling dangerous wire-coil, not looking for trouble but looking to get stoned and laid. Even in the most desolate one-horse town, Filbert had a natural knack for finding what he referred to as the "knack-a-luscious." Sturgis turned out to be a knack-a-luscious fountainhead of the "finest herb, sizzling steaks and sweet poontang" from which flowed the essential oils of Filbert's liquidity.

Filbert never carried drugs or weapons, reasoning thusly, "Being I'm prone to search and seizure for stepping off a curb requires a certain dexterity, shall we say, a lightness of being, you know what I mean." Filbert's lightness of being required him to always be on the hunt, hungry for some tasty morsel, scavenging voraciously and rarely prone to contemplation until well after completion of whatever dastardly deed satisfied his lust.

In Chicago, Filbert disappeared occasionally on some one-percenter errand I had no business knowing. Filbert reappeared, "Topsy-turvy," he said, "the state of national affairs is a fluffing disgrace, the international situation dire, we need to get our heads on straight, we need to view this artist on Halsted." Or hear a poet on Clark. Or see a dancer on Wells. Or listen to a musical combo on King Drive. "Let's investigate the downtown literary scene; there's this publishing venture, see, and the contributing editor has attributes, you know what I mean, views on contemporaneous endowments, right?"

We would attend whatever extravaganza Filbert found inspiration in attending. It always revolved around some brilliant virtuoso, a singular genius in which Filbert would weasel his way backstage to brashly and humbly engage the genius in dialogue. Once his intellectual curiosity was satisfied, he'd troll the stragglers in the audience for someone possessing a bowl that could be consumed in a hallway or back alley, forthwith. Then he'd target connections to a meal at an odd, random hour or perhaps find a sultry body to flirt and plot dalliances to come.

"Fucking Filbert," his friends would say, and even strangers to Filbert empathized with that sentiment. "He fucked my old lady."

"What's worse, he smoked all my weed."

And all would say in a frustrated and exhausted tone that, "I always thought of him as my best friend." Filbert was everyone's best friend, he had an innate ability to exploit any weakness in human nature, not viciously, but charmingly methodical, with an all-knowing smile, as if you've just been let in on the joke, just been revealed the con, seconds before realizing you're the punch line, you're the sad mark. And the realization dawns just as Filbert with his quirky smirk and wink of an eye "be flying out the door and down the steps fleet-footed."

Imagine a clueless husband home from a long day at the corporate office, wondering stupidly about his wife's contented smile as he blindly reaches for his private stash and just as Filbert's motorcycle fires up in the alley outside his window asks his distracted wife "hey honey, where's my weed?"

"Fucking Filbert."

It's a wonder nobody shot him dead. I once overheard a prominent local DJ confiding to a colleague not on-air, so honest ad-lib, melodically lamenting his own predicament, opining in sad, but crude admiration that, "you have to admit, Filbert's a world class cock-hound, hell, I once pulled him off a female intern, I mean grabbed a hold his ankles and just yanked, and that son of a bitch just kept humping the air like a horny dog on an invisible leg."

Nobody shot him, that's the official story, the version as reported in newspapers and as appeared on the Internet. Nobody shot him but he died of a gunshot wound to the head, self-inflicted according to authorities. Apparently, Filbert found infidelity or imagined indiscretions by his old lady so he shot her; a superficial wound she survived. He fled, mounted his bike, fired it up, put the gun to his head and ended his life.

Fucking Filbert.

-Kenn Hartmann

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