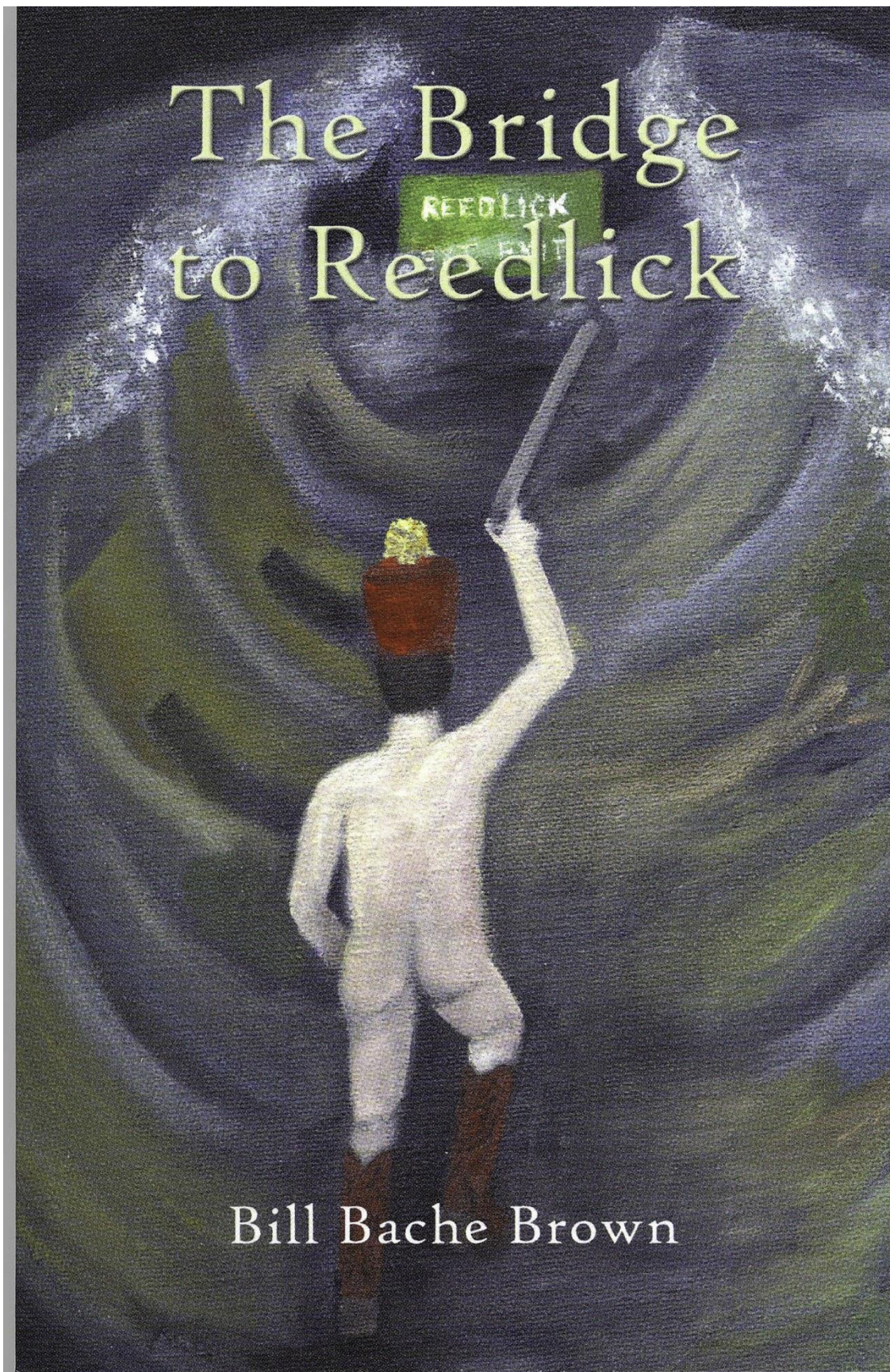


The Bridge to Reedlick

REEDLICK
STATE PARK

Bill Bache Brown



*Dreams are true while they last,
And do we not live in dreams?*

-Alfred Lord Tennyson

Chapter 1

The laser of Dick's anger beamed through his eyes and bored through the receptionist. Her nonchalance was the last straw after a bad night during which the dream that haunted him these past four months had left him on the edge, almost out of control, a position he had not found himself in for over twenty years.

"Mr. Retsel is here to see you, Doctor Relda," the receptionist said into the intercom without turning her attention away from the crossword puzzle on the desk in front of her.

"Thank you, Miss Schiff," came the reply from the speaker.

Dick Retsel fidgeted with his cap as he stood at her desk. His nervousness sprang from his dislike of not being in charge, of having to depend on someone else to solve his problem. It's not that Dick wanted life to be clean and predictable. After all it was part of his job as a Secret Service Agent to recognize the unpredictable in life and to make sure it did not lead to some dire consequence. He prided himself on being able to figure things out quickly and react.

But he had been having a recurring dream now for some time, a not particularly scary or bad dream, certainly not a nightmare, but one that always woke him. It had been happening for several weeks now and the lack of sleep was beginning to interfere with his work. He had taken some vacation time to try to get to the bottom off it.

It was precisely because the dream was not only a regular occurrence, but was also pretty straight forward with never varying details that made it difficult for Dick. It frustrated him that he could not figure out what the details added up to. But each night when he woke up with the feeling of that hand on his arm, he was convinced that the dream had some meaning for him, that perhaps his subconscious mind was trying to tell him something. He suspected that it might possibly have to do with the death of his wife a few months before in a car accident. Yet he could not link any of the dream's details to that event.

That was what made this dream business ironically difficult for him. It was so predictable but it was not cleanly so. The unknown about it, what it meant, was what weighed heavily on Dick's mind. Dr. Regnado, the first psychiatrist he had visited, had warned him that uncovering the meaning and releasing himself from the dream would not be easy, but was probably necessary if he were ever to have peace of mind again.

"Dream interpretation is not really one of my specialties," Regnado had said to him. "At least not when the dream code is this tough to crack. I have a friend and colleague, though, one Ernest Relda, who has a reputation for being able to puzzle out just about any dream. I suggest you go to see him."

And so Dick now found him self in the offices of Dr. Ernest Relda, unsure of just what was about to transpire.

"Relda has quite a reputation as an interpreter of dreams. And often just figuring out what

a dream means will help to make it go away,” Dr. Regnado had told Dick.

He couldn't imagine how anyone could explore any more possibilities that he and Regnado already had. And he was, quite frankly, feeling intimidated. He knew he was not crazy, but he also felt he could go crazy if he did not get the bottom of his dream. And he had to do it soon before it interfered with his work as a Secret Service agent. If anyone there knew how this dream business was affecting him, he might be relieved of his duties on the grounds that he was unstable and therefore unreliable.

When even the sedatives Dr. Regnado had prescribed did not help Dick sleep better, he decided to see Dr. Relda.

“Please sit down, Mr. Retsel. The Doctor will be with you shortly,” Miss Schiff said, obviously irritated by this nervous looking man standing in front of her.

Dick took a seat near the receptionist's desk and continued to fidget with his cap. As was his habit, he looked around the room carefully noting the layout of the office. What he noticed most was that there wasn't much to take note of. In fact, what was most notable was the lack of detail in the office. At best it could be described as austere, but even that word didn't quite capture the almost bareness of it.

The walls were plain flat white but very clean as if they had just been painted. The floor was covered with a neutral tan carpet, also looking as if it had recently been installed. There were two doors, one behind Dick, the one he had used to enter the office from the hall, and one opposite it, presumably the door to Dr. Relda's office. Miss Stiff's desk sat almost in the middle of the room facing the door to the hall. Two chairs for waiting patients lined the wall to the right. The only decoration was a print of Hieronymus Bosch's *Hell*. *An odd choice for a psychiatrist's office*, Dick thought. *Or maybe not, come to think of it, especially the office of a*

psychiatrist who specializes in bad dreams.

He was familiar with the work of Bosch because his beloved Dolores had been an artist, and one of their regular activities together was to visit the art galleries in the area. In fact, Dolores was on her way to The Baltimore Gallery Art where some of her paintings were on exhibit when that truck came out of nowhere and took her away from him.

He shifted in his chair and sighed.

“Patience, Mr. Retsel, Doctor will be with you shortly, I’m sure.”

He hated the officiousness that doctors’ staff always seemed to possess, the intimidation by deference. It was always “The Doctor” or just “Doctor.” That’s what he had liked about Regnado; he was just a good down to earth family doctor type, a guy you called by his first name. In fact, Dick always made it a point to call a doctor, any doctor, by his first name as soon as possible to establish that he did not feel it necessary to pay any particular obeisance to the man just because he had an MD after his name. To Dick a doctor was just a highly skilled and therefore highly paid technician, not unlike himself, whose decisions could be the difference between a man living or dying.

Dick sat there for a few more minutes without even a magazine to thumb through. Finally the door to the doctor’s office opened, and a pleasant looking man about Dick’s age, that is about forty, came out. Dick had expected to see someone with short cropped hair wearing round black rimmed spectacles, sporting a goatee and clothed in some outdated high collared coat with a wide tie filling the gap between wide lapels; instead he saw a man who looked as if he had just come off the golf course. He was tanned, clean-shaven, and wearing a knit shirt.

“Come in, Dick” he said in a friendly way, though his eyes did not convey friendliness. They were deep-set dark eyes of indeterminate color.

Dick rose and walked to the door. He offered his hand in his friendly gentleman's way, as he always did.

Dr. Relda made a sweeping gesture with his hand toward the chair that sat facing his desk, but did not take Dick's hand.

Once again, out of habit Dick gave the room the once over. It seemed even more sparse than the reception room. Conspicuously absent were any wall hangings at all – no pictures, no diplomas, no certificates. There was only a single desk with its modest chair in the middle of the room; facing it was the comfortable looking stuffed chair Dr. Relda had gestured to a moment ago. The stuffed chair was covered in a deep red leather. It stood in sharp contrast to the austerity of the rest of the office. The desk and Relda's chair looked new but inexpensive. On the desk was a simple lamp illuminating a note pad with some scribbles on it.

Relda gestured again toward the red chair.

"Please sit down, Dick."

"Thank you, Doctor, I will." He had meant to say, "Thank you, Ernie," to establish their equality, but the doctor had made him feel so comfortable he reverted to the more formal manner of addressing him. Suddenly he felt manipulated and just stood there. His lack of sleep was really starting to get to him.

"Have a seat, Dick," the doctor repeated as he indicated the chair by the desk.

"Thank you, Doctor," Dick replied.

"You can call me Ernie," the doctor replied in a way that made Dick feel almost as if the doctor could read his mind.

Relda looked at the note pad on his desk.

"Hmm. Not much here. All I know about you is that your regular psychiatrist sent you

here.”

“He’s not my *regular psychiatrist*. I don’t have a regular psychiatrist. I went to see him once because of this dream business! “ There was an angry, resentful edge to his voice that surprised even him. Before Relda could respond, Dick said, “I’m sorry, Doctor. It’s just that I ‘m so tired, and I don’t want anyone to think I’m crazy.”

“It’s okay, Dick. You don’t have to be crazy to see a psychiatrist. Now, why don’t you just tell me a little about yourself in general before we get to the specifics of why you are here. You know -What do you do for a living? How old are you? That kind of thing.”

Dick hated just that kind of thing. He was not a man of words as much as a man of action. He wanted to say *Let’s cut the crap and find out what the hell is going on with these damn dreams*, but instead he decided to play the game if it would help him get to the bottom of this and began.

“Well, I’m forty-one years old. I’m single, widowed actually, for almost a year – she was killed in a car crash – no kids. And I’m a Secret Service Agent assigned to guard the President of the United States. Officially I’m on vacation right now.”

“What was your wife’s name?”

“Dolores. She went by Dolores Wangert. You may have heard of her; she was gaining somewhat of a reputation around here as an artist.”

Relda made no response. He obviously was not into chitchat at this moment. He went on.

“Officially on vacation, Dick? What does that mean? Aren’t all vacations official?”

“Well I’d like to take medical leave because of the fatigue and stress. That’s why I’m here, to see if you can help me with that.”

He paused as Relda just gazed at him with those dark eyes. Dick did not like it when he

could not read a man's eyes. Being able to read a man's eyes was something he prided himself in and it had gotten him out of many tight spots.

"What I'm telling you is strictly confidential, isn't it? I mean you don't have to report any of this to the Service do you?"

"Of course not, Dick; but why is that a concern?"

"It's just that if they think I am somehow unstable or even under too much stress, they will question my ability to function. But my work is all I really have now."

"Don't you worry about that, Dick. I can feel how dedicated you are to your work. And I can understand because I feel the same kind of dedication to my work.

"Now what *exactly* brings you here, Dick?"

"It's the dream, Doctor. I keep having this dream, the same dream every night and I can't get a handle on it. It seems so real, but I can't make sense of it. I can't stop having it, and I can't understand it. I mean it scares me. It's as if there is message in it for me, and I should be able to figure it out. And that it's important that I do."

"Is this nightmare terribly frightening?"

"That's the thing, Doc; it's not really a nightmare. I mean it's not filled with spooky creatures or scary situations, nothing like that.

"It's not scary, but it scares you. That's interesting. How do you suppose that can be?"

"It's just this sense of something looming around it. Maybe 'lurking' is a better word. I don't sleep well because it's hard to fall asleep; I mean, what with the anticipation of the dream and all, and then I wake up at the end of the dream and can't get back to sleep. And the lack of sleep is really starting to get to me. And . . ."

"You said it seems so real, and rightfully so, Dick, " the Doctor said. "First understand

that it *is* real. And together maybe we can sort out its meaning.”

“What do you mean ‘it’s real’? Aren’t dreams just fantasies, just some weird expression of our subconscious?” Dick was well versed in the language of modern psychobabble. He heard it all the time in the motivational tapes he listened to daily.

“In a way, but they are also real. You see what happens in a dream is as real as what happens in our waking lives. It is imprinted on our psyches just like our other experiences. Dreams are real experiences that happen on a different plain of existence.”

Relda looked intently at Dick, but his eyes showed no light at all. *It’s probably just the light in the room*, Dick thought, *but it’s almost as if he has no eyes*. But Dick felt more than uncomfortable. He shuddered. He relied on his ability to read others’ eyes and this man’s eyes were a mystery, to him and he did not want his dream to be real. He wanted it to be a fantasy; and he wanted to dismiss it as such. He wanted to be able to trust this man who might be able to help him unravel it all. And now this man he wanted to trust was telling him his dream is real. At this point he could neither read this man’s eyes nor trust him.

“But if that is true, why do I keep having the same dream over and over again as if I were in that *Groundhog Day* movie? I mean if it is real as you say, wouldn’t I just have it and be done with it?”

“That is what we need to explore,” Doctor Relda responded.

Dr. Relda’s demeanor changed suddenly. Up till now he had been casual, almost lighthearted. He had been a teacher telling his student some elementary facts about his subject. Now he became serious. He sat forward and his posture seemed more to match his eyes.

“Once we begin the process, you may not like what we find,” Retsel said. “Usually what we find is pretty benign. But sometimes it’s not. Do you know why Dr. ah,” he paused while he

glanced at Dick's paper work on the desk without picking it up, "Regnado sent you to *me*?" He said Regnado's name as if he had never encountered it before.

Odd, Dick thought, *Regnado had told me they're good friends*. He was a good agent who prided himself on not missing small details that might pose a danger to the President.

"Not really. He said something about you're being pretty good with dreams,"

Dick replied.

"I'm more than just pretty good with dreams," the psychiatrist replied. "I pride myself on going into dreams as no other man can. And I repeat, once we go in you may not like what you find. But I also have a rule. Once we do go in, there is no turning back, no matter what we find."

He paused, and his eyes seemed to flash for an instant; but Dick said nothing.

"Are you sure this is what you want to do?"

Dick felt like someone who had just had a heart attack and was asked if he wanted to go through with the procedure that would save his life. The dream had been so disturbing to him that he felt he would do just about anything to be rid of it.

He nodded and said almost in a whisper, "Yes." As he said it he realized he had no idea what exactly it was that they were going to do.

"Shall we begin then." It was a statement not a question.

"Tell me about the dream."

"Well the dream itself is not so bad; it's really the waking that's scary," Dick replied.

"Tell me about the waking after you have told me about the dream, and maybe together we can unravel it."

"Okay, here goes," Dick replied as he put his head back, closed his eyes, and began to see

again what he had seen so often these past few months.

“I have just finished an exhausting journey and find myself in a small town called Reedlick.”

“That sound like a town in Texas, Dick. Is that Reed Lick - two words? Or one word like Reedlick?”

“Just one word,” Dick replied. “And I think it might be in North Dakota, not Texas.”

“Hmmm?” Doctor Relda responded. “Why do you say that?”

“Because it looks very much like the little town in North Dakota where I grew up.”

“You can tell me more about that later. For now just give me the basics. We’ll probe the details after I get an overall picture.”

“Well, I’m there to find some guy named Lester Kidd.”

Dr. Relda sat up straight and gazed at Dick for just a moment as if he recognized the name Lester Kidd. His eyes flashed again.

“You’re sure of the name; it sounds so specific for a dream. I mean often we remember people but not always with such a specific name. Does the name ever change?”

“Listen, Doctor Ernie, I’ve had this dream so many times you can rely on the details.” Dick was becoming impatient and a little angry.

Doctor Relda shifted in his chair as if to appear more relaxed.

Dick told himself to relax too, that he had been so agitated lately because of the dream that he was exaggerating Relda’s reactions. *After all*, he thought, *the man is trying to help me*.

“Why do you think you find yourself in a Texas-sounding town in North Dakota?”

Dick sat up and leaned forward toward Relda. “I know exactly why it’s a town in North Dakota. I told you, I was born in a small town in North Dakota and lived there until sixth grade.

I mean that makes sense doesn't?"

"What town was that?"

"Just a little place near the Badlands, called Killdeer."

"Fascinating. Is that an Indian name, like the place where they kill deer?"

"No. Actually it's named after a bird called the killdeer. But what does all this have to do with my dream?"

"Well, Dick, dreams are highly symbolic. Our subconscious takes lots of ordinary details and juxtaposes them in many interesting and odd ways to send meanings to us. I thought perhaps your dream has something to do with killing. And in the odd way our subconscious has of twisting detail, perhaps it does. Why do you suppose your subconscious takes you to a town in North Dakota, like the town where you were born, that sounds like a place in Texas?"

He sure doesn't know me very well, Dick mused to himself, if he thinks I have killing on my mind other than to stop it from happening.

He went on.

"Not only is it like the town where I was born; it is the mirror image of the town where I was born. Everything I can remember is there, except backwards. Even the house where I'm supposed to go asking for Lester is just like the house I grew up in except it's on the opposite side of the street, and the street number is backward. Ours was 308; it is 803. It's like my life is taking place in a mirror"

Dr. Relda shifted again in his chair and glanced at his note pad on the table next to him.

Dick realized that Relda had not jotted any notes the whole time they had been talking.

"Tell me again the name of the man you are seeking in the dream."

"Lester Kidd."

“You’re sure of the name. And do you find him at 803?”

“No, I don’t find Lester Kidd at 803. I don’t find anybody at 803. I was sent to find him but I never do.” Dick Retsel declared firmly. “Why do you keep asking me about the name. It seems to mean more to you than it does to me. I have no idea who the hell Lester Kidd is or why I was sent to find him. That’s what you’re supposed to be helping me find out.”

Dick was shouting now.

“Calm down, Dick,” Relda almost whispered. His eyes, though, flashed again briefly, then caught Dick’s and held them, and Dick immediately felt, not a calmness, but more an inclination toward obedience come over him. It was the obedience of fear, not the obedience of respect, or honor, or duty out of which he regularly operated.

“I’m sorry, Doctor; this whole dream thing just has me very upset.” He took a deep breath, paused for a moment to regain his composure, and then went on.

“Like I told you, it’s the end of the dream that really gets to me. Every night, because I’ve experienced it so often, it terrorizes me when I realize the dream is coming to an end.”

“What do you mean ‘terrorizes’ you?”

“Because each night I am awakened by a hand, a rough hand around my wrist. I feel it just as I raise my hand in the dream to knock on the door of 803. I feel the hand gripping my wrist as I awake. The hand is never there by the time I’m fully awake, but my wrist is often red and it stings.”

“Hmmm,” Dr. Ernest Relda said to no one in particular. “That’s not unusual either, to have some physical manifestation of the dream upon awaking. It’s not unlike when a person is under hypnosis and experiences physical reactions based only on hypnotic suggestion. It’s not all that common in regard to dreams but it’s not unheard of. Believe it or not, some of this is

starting to make some sense to me. But our hour is almost over, and I have another patient waiting. Go out to Miss Schiff and make another appointment for tomorrow. If she says there are no openings, tell her I said to squeeze you in for fifteen minutes.

“I have one more question before we wrap up. The hand that wakes you up, is it a woman’s hand or a man’s hand?”

“I think it definitely is a man’s hand. I mean it’s a strong hand. I’ve felt it so often now I’d be able to identify the person who touched me with it.”

“You’re really that sure? I mean could it be your wife’s hand?”

“The first time it happen I thought maybe it could be Dolores’s hand. I mean I thought I was dreaming about her in some way, or the dream was caused somehow by her death. I don’t know.”

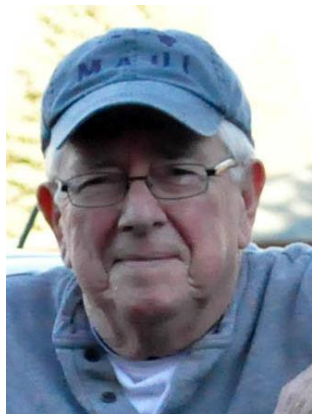
“I think I want to know more about the hand, Dick. If you have the dream again try to find out who the hand belongs to.”

“Oh, I’m sure I’ll have the dream again.”

Dick arose, offered his hand to Dr. Relda. When Relda did not respond with his own hand, Dick simply turned and walked toward the door.

“Yes, I think he may be the real deal,” Dr. Relda said almost as if he didn’t realize Dick had not yet left the room. He laughed, and the sound of it brought to Dick’s mind not the sound of Relda’s voice but the flash Dick had seen in his eyes.

Bill Bache Brown Bio



Bill Bache Brown, author of *The Bridge to Reedlick*, is also the author, writing as Lucian Wurhmwuhd, of the award winning satire *The Day the EPA Went Down: a novel of evil, redemption and exploding chili* (CIPA Gold Award for fiction), which a former EPA employee compared to *Catch 22*. Several readers have described it as “laugh out loud funny.”

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