

Featured story:

THE GLOVE

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We like patterns and familiar scenes. They make us feel secure and that the world is predictable. But take a normal everyday object and put it in a less familiar scene and watch what happens.

After many years of residence on campus I was ready to take the big leap into living in my own place, an apartment all to myself. I still had neighbours on the other side of the walls (& floor & ceiling) but the bathroom was not a public one. I had a big bed I could stretch out on and the kitchen was conveniently located and open 24 hours a day. Of course that also meant I had to learn how to take proper advantage of it, gradually building up the needed accessories, utensils and knowledge of how to work through a recipe.

My living room replaced the TV lounge on the girls' floor of my college. I missed the random and easy intermingling with people who also were in need of sharing some of their time with others, but it was also nice to just chill out for a while on the long sofa. Fortunately I was fairly active socially and there was never a shortage of people dropping by so I never really got to feel lonely there.

One late evening I returned to my home, switched on the bright warm yellow lights welcoming me further into my abode, and entered the living room. Placed somewhere between that unclearly defined space hovering between my living room and the entrance to the bedroom was an object on the floor that definitely did not belong to the familiar picture I would normally expect to greet me.

It threw me off because it was a strange object and it was a stranger to me, being no part of my home. It made me stop in my tracks, as if frozen in some pause function on a video player. I looked at it for a short time, and eventually released myself from this bondage to lean over and pick it up.

The object that had startled me so much was a transparent plastic glove, the type women might use while dying their hair or what we sometimes see in supermarkets these days, to be used in handling the fruits and vegetables. My first rational thoughts coming from my brain awakening from its momentary stupor centered around the possibility that it was dropped by a thief.

Maybe the thief was still here. Like in the movies, we watch somebody investigate their home while we, safe on the sofa or the popcorn-filled cinema, want to wisely scream out, "No, no, don't open that door!" Still, I couldn't realistically relax in my own home until I felt secure in the knowledge there wasn't anyone hiding somewhere. I quietly and gingerly checked out what was in each room, behind every door, nook & cranny. Satisfied (and relieved) there was no-one there but me, my thoughts returned to the glove.

We sometimes regard ourselves as intelligent rational people, having reasonably realistic perspectives directing our actions in this world. But we never really know what we would do until we're actually in the situation. And then the resulting reactions can truly surprise us as we watch ourselves do something we would normally consider 'out of character'.

If I was on the sofa watching a movie of someone like me, going through the sequences I did, I would surely have thought of much better ways to act. But I didn't have that convenient distance to fall back on. It was me, there, at that moment, looking at the glove. Which was on my hand.

I think I put it on immediately after picking it up. I suppose I was trying to make sense of it and a way to familiarize myself in this disorientating anomaly was to bring it closer in contact, to try the idea on, as it were.

Well, there it was, fitting nicely over each of my fingers, almost about to wave hello to me. It wasn't until later that the shock of everything wore off and it dawned on me that I was now smudging any remains of fingerprints within the glove. "How could I be so stupid?" I silently yelled at myself.

I guess around that time I began to become more rationally functional and proceeded to take an accounting of any possibly stolen objects. No, the pocket money I left stashed under my socks in a drawer was still there, the little that I had. My stereo system was intact (whew!) and what few possessions I owned that might be considered valuable by others were still in their rightful places. Nothing seemed missing nor out of place.

So why, then, was my apartment entered? Was it for some reason other than burglary? Maybe it wasn't a thief who got spooked and left hurriedly. Maybe this glove was a message from a deranged psychopathic serial killer, one that got his (or her) inspirations from the myriad of images accosting us daily on TV.

It was then I picked up the phone and called the police. They came, asked a few questions, then left. And that was the last I ever heard from them.

Over time any anxiety I had from the affair dissipated and other current concerns easily replaced my thoughts on the matter. It was an unsolved puzzle that popped up every now and then, taunting me to have another look at it.

AFTERWORD:

I still like the world to be predictable and invest some effort to keep it that way. But now I face everything with a big grain of salt. I know that the sun may not rise tomorrow. It probably will, but there have been so many sudden and life-changing events in my life that this knowledge has wedged itself into how I see the world. It doesn't usually occupy a big space but I walk through my steps with a slightly greater understanding of the vulnerability of my views and of myself. And it nudges me more towards appreciating what I have while I have it.