The Mortley Connection

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Did I ever tell you about the time Myron Mortley conned me into a blind date with his out-of-town cousin, Ernie? Probably not, it being a memory I’d prefer to crumple rather than frame. You’d expect a relative of Southford High’s reigning moron to be equally as nauseating, wouldn’t you? Just look at Myron, for Pete’s sake—slicked back hair, horn-rimmed glasses, buck teeth and what-have-you.

Of course, it was unfair to assume his cousin would be just as pathetic, I’ll admit. Blind dates are about as predictable as the weather, so I suppose it was my own fault for not carrying an umbrella that Friday night. Funny how it only seemed to rain on me, though!

"Sara, this is Ernie," my mother announced, batting her eyes at the raven-haired god beside her in our front hall.

I stared in disbelief. Where were his bony elbows? His buck teeth? His bow tie? Smiling politely, I pulled her aside. "Are you sure this is Myron Mortley’s cousin?"

"Yes, I’m Ernie Mortley," the sapphire-eyed stranger confirmed with an amused grin. "Myron and I really don’t have very much in common."

Nobody answered; my mother and I were both in a trance.

"Uh, would you like to get going, Sara?" Ernie cleared his throat.

"You bet!" I sang, tossing my awed mother an affectionate You-Lose look over my shoulder. She gave me a hearty thumbs-up.

Ernie swung open the door of a sleek red sports car glowing in our humble driveway. "What a nice car!" Flashing my most winning smile, I slid into the front seat and onto a box of Kleenex.

"Thanks," Ernie beamed, giving the steering wheel an affectionate pat. He focused his whirlpool blue eyes on my adoring brown ones and smiled. "Would you like to get something to eat? The movie doesn’t start until eight-thirty."

"I’d love to," I replied, clasping my hands around my knee.

"I know a good Chinese restaurant. Do you like Chinese food, Sara?"
"I love Chinese food," I lied.

"Oh good." He seemed pleased. "Have you seen 'In the Dark' before?"

"No I haven't," I lied again. My best friend Lily and I had only seen the movie five times, and memorized every line.

"It's a great movie," he remarked, nodding. "I've seen it once before, but I can't wait to see it again."

"Oh, I know! That part where he came swinging down from the telephone wire was hysterical, wasn't it?" I chuckled.

He glanced sideways at me. "I thought you've never seen it."

"Uh, coming attractions." I cleared my throat.

He pulled into Fung Sing Yoo's drive. As he hurried around the car to open my door, I wrinkled my nose. Even the parking lot smelled like chopped suey! "Thank you," I purred, tripping over the seat belt as I climbed out.

"Are you ok?" He grabbed my arm before I could fall on my face.

I stared at his gorgeous hand, and wished for once my clothes had static cling. No such luck. "Oh, silly me, I'm fine," I responded, fluttering my lashes. A fleck of mascara caught and momentarily blinded me. I stumbled before him into the dark restaurant.

A waitress handed us menus scrawled in Chinese. I stared at mine in silence, peering over the top at Ernie while he calmly scanned his own. Uh oh, was I supposed to know Chinese? Ernie did. Now he'd think I was uncultured, besides being uncoordinated.

He looked up and smiled. "Are you ready to order, Sara? Anything in particular you'd like?"

An interpreter, please, with a glass of water, perhaps. I coughed. "Uhmm, I'm not quite sure just yet. Everything looks so good tonight!"

He squinted at my menu and grinned suddenly. "I see you find the Chinese side interesting, too. I used to compare it to the American version, on the flip side."

"Flip side?" I echoed, whirling the menu around. Thank God, they did speak English here! "Ah yes, the good old American version!"

"Can you read Chinese, Sara?" Ernie asked, brows raised.
"Not fluently," I said modestly.

A waitress crowned with silky black hair bowed slightly to us.

"Good evening! Are you ready to order?" she inquired.

I wondered if we were supposed to bow back. Deciding to play it safe, I bent forward a bit, and in the process knocked the salt shaker to the floor. "You're on a roll," I mumbled, stooping to reach it.

"Pardon me?"

"I said egg roll," I spoke up, banging my head on the table before popping up to the surface again. "I'd like an egg roll, please."

"I'll have an egg roll too," Ernie added, eyes shielded beneath a hand.

After dinner we walked across the street to the movie theatre. Already a winding line stretched from the ticket booth, and we joined the end of it amidst enthused chatter. While Ernie's eyes sailed across the bobbing heads of the crowd, I tried to think of something clever to say. "Yowl!" Grabbing my foot, I glared at the fat lady who'd stomped on it.

"Sara? Sara!"

Lily was waving her arms ten people ahead of us. Oh no! How would I explain I was out on a date with Myron Mortley's cousin? Lily despised Myron. I dodged behind the fat lady, but Ernie tugged on my sleeve.

"Sara? Someone's calling you," he informed me.

Lily bounced up, out of breath. She stared at Ernie.

"Uh, hi, Lily," I chirped. "Who're you here with?"

"I don't remember. Who are YOU here with?" she smoothed her strawberry blond curls.

"Uh, this is Ernie; Ernie, this is Lily," I muttered, closing my eyes.

"It's an absolute pleasure to meet you," she cooed. "This is just the greatest movie!"

"Yes, I've seen it once before," Ernie agreed.

"Fifth time for us!" Lily sang, swinging an arm around my hunched shoulders.

"Fifth?" Ernie echoed, raising a brow at me.
"Oh, it's our favorite!" Especially the part where he comes swinging down from the telephone wire! That's Sara's scene. Sara just loves that part, don't you, Sara?"
Sara just wanted to die.
Just when I didn't think things could get any worse, they did.

Myron Mortley, toothpick arms wrapped around three boxes of popcorn, a green cotton candy, and a chocolate bar the size of a 2x4, was headed straight for us. Lily wrinkled her freckled nose and nudged Ernie.

"Ugh! Here comes the biggest moron in our school," she gagged.
I covered my eyes with both hands.
"Hey dude!" Myron yelped, delighted to bump into his cousin. "What's boppin', bud?"
"Who's all that food for, pal?" Ernie asked.
"Those guys over there," Myron replied, nodding toward a gang of black-jacketed hoodlums huddled together in the curb. He winked at Ernie. "I told you Sara was one sizzlin' sensation, didn't I?"

My neck began melting as Lily's eyes narrowed at me.
"Hey dudes! We can really party now!" Myron crowed, bending his bony knees in and out. "Hey! Let's all sit together! Everybody!" He spread his arms wide, oblivious to the popcorn, cotton candy and chocolate as it crashed on his cowboy boots.
"Isn't this going to be awesome? It's so lucky we bumped into each other, isn't it?"

"Uh, Myron," I interrupted, yanking him aside. "Just between you and me...See those two girls up ahead? The ones with the long blonde hair?"
He squinted. "And tight jeans?"
I grimaced. "Yes, and tight jeans. Well, I just heard them ask if anyone knew who the great looking guy in the Bugs Bunny T-shirt was."

Myron pointed to his saturated head.
"That's right, Myron!" You! So why don't you go on over and introduce yourself? Sit with them, make their night!"
"Because I reckon you'd justa git jealous, ma'am, and I couldn't rightly let mah main woman down," he slurred, tipping his raccoon cap, and throwing a weasel arm over my shoulder.
"Uh, look, Myron, I'm really flattered," I argued, wrenching myself free, "but I'll always be here. They won't! Take advantage, for Pete's sake!"

He cracked his knuckles and patted his Lone Ranger belt buckle. "Fine then, y'perdy I'll thing. I'll justa mosey on over and make those squaws happy, I reckon."

"Atta go, Tiger," I agreed, slapping his back.

Lily was still staring as I ushered Ernie and her up to the ticket booth. "Why on earth are you talking to Myron Mortley?" she hissed into my ear. "How could you waste time with a Mortley, when you have a date like Ernie?!" She cleared her throat and nodded to Ernie. "That Myron! He's so disgusting!"

I was preparing to slap her when the screams struck.

"AAAAAUGHHHH!

Startled, everyone turned toward the curb. The gang of hoodlums had gathered around a rusty Chevy. Two stood on its hood, arms stretched upward huge hands grasping Myron's writhing ankles. He dangled like an animated sausage above the concrete. Standing a few yards away were the two tightly-jeaned blondes, smoking and tossing their hair. I slapped my forehead (several times).

"AAAAAUGHHHH!

Ernie hurried forward. The hairiest hoodlum glanced at him from the Chevy's hood and snorted. "What's the scene, man?"

"Bad, bad," Myron wheezed, twirling in circles at our feet.

"Shut uppa you mouth!" the hoodlum growled, shaking a chained fist. "You, you dead man, dead, one mo' wood outta you mouth!"

"What's going on, guys?" Ernie asked casually, shaking his own hand at a cigarette one of the blondes offered him.

"This faggot-" the hoodlum gestured toward Myron's purple face- "was hittin' on our chicks! Ain't nobody hit on our chicks! We gonna fix it so's he ain't never gonna hit on our chicks again, man, you dig?"

We all dug.

"YOU dig, faggot?" the hoodlum shoved Myron's back with his boot, sending him sailing back and forth over the Chevy's bumper. He held a finger over the bridge of his horn-rimmed glasses to keep them in place.

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He was also attracting a bigger crowd than 'In the Dark'.

"AAAAAUGHHHHH!"

"Now Myron," Ernie sighed, stooping on one knee beside his cousin's rotating head. "How many times have I told you never to hit on another man's chick?"

"I forgot," Myron whined, whacking the hoodlum on the knee.

"Ah ah ah, a lesson learned the hard way," Ernie scolded, crossing his arms. He straightened and shook his head while the hoodlums watched. "You know, this is really embarrassing," he continued with a loud sigh. "Especially since this is Flying Fist Fletcher's son and all."

Silence.

"Flying Fist Fletcher? The boxer? The undefeated light-weight fighting at the arena Saturday night?" The hairy hoodlum's eyes bulged. "This geek is Flying Fist Fletcher's son?"

Ernie held up his hands. "He's not mine. I'm only the chauffeur."

"Put 'im down, put 'im down, put 'im down!" the hoodlum barked to his cronies. Myron slapped onto the pavement in a handstand, and then crawled dizzily into the curb.

"Hey buddy, we worry 'bout all this, see? We just kiddin' with ya, man, ya dig? Hey man, maybe ya could get us some tickets, dig? So's we can root on your ol' man, see? How 'bout it, buddy?"

Myron wobbled before him, staring cross-eyed.

"Uh, tell you what," Ernie interrupted, grabbing Myron's arms to steady him. "I'll have a word with Mr. Fletcher myself, and see what I can do."

He led his cousin away.

The hairy hoodlum poked me in the arm. "Hey mama, that geek ain't really flying Fist Fletcher's son, is he?" he asked, in awe.

"They really don't have much in common," I agreed.
I did make it through the night, by the way. On my front porch beneath the full moon, Ernie and I exchanged the traditional "I had a wonderful time", while Myron howled from the sports car, "Aren't cha gonna kiss 'er good night?!" Since I had turned to glare at the obnoxious moron in my driveway, Ernie's kiss landed on my ear. I shook his hand solemnly and watched him slip back into his car, whacking Myron's hand off the gear shift before backing out of the driveway.

I sat down on my front porch, trying to figure out the Mortley connection.

I am still sitting there.

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