Happy

He said, “My biggest fantasy is to have sex in a bathtub full of red jell-o. What’s yours?”

I began to contemplate the logistics of a bathtub full of red jell-o as I quickly put a forkful of the dried out, overcooked home fries I had been pushing around my plate, into my mouth. Chewing slowly, I looked over at him. He was waiting for my answer. I chewed a bit, pointed at my mouth, chewed some more, washed it down with a sip of orange juice, followed by a sip of coffee, and then a sip of water. I looked up at him again and he said:

“Well?”

“How can I possibly beat that? I’ll have to get back to you on that one.”

He gave me a look as if I had just confirmed his suspicion that I, in fact, had no imagination, or he thought I was a chicken. I thought I heard him mumble, “Chicken,” under his breath, but his lips clearly didn’t move. He changed the subject.

I realized I must eat more slowly; he had been doing all of the talking and had hardly touched his omelet. But that was OK with me because it gave me time to think. He began to talk about his brother. I didn’t know his brother and therefore had no true point of reference, but as far as I could tell he worshiped his brother. I tried to chew my food thirty-five times per forkful. It was impossible.

And I wondered, how much red jell-o would it take to fill a bathtub? If a single box makes six servings, that’s about six cups. If there are two cups in a pint, that’s three pints, or 1 1/2 quarts. There’s 4 quarts in a gallon so 3 boxes makes a gallon plus. But how many gallons does it take to fill a bathtub? Ten? Twenty? And Jeff has got to
be 6’3” or 6’4”. He couldn’t possibly fit in an average bathtub comfortably by himself, much less comfortably with someone else, with or without the jell-o. And, how much less jell-o would you need with two full-grown adults in the tub? What is the displacement in gallons of jell-o? And how full is a full bathtub anyway?

I looked past Jeff out the window at all the smiling, presumably happy people walking by, and wondered if they were rejoicing in the warmth of the first nice day when they could wear their shorts or sleeveless dresses and summer shoes again. Or had all those smiling people finally realized that the American dream of guaranteed permanent happiness is a myth? That one doesn’t need to buy all that stuff to be happy, and thus they were able to enjoy themselves? Or conversely, maybe they had made that final purchase that would make them happy for a week or two, until they realized what it was they were actually lacking, what they still needed to buy. But for now, they could smile and be happy.

It seemed strange: unlike my blindingly white body, they were all slightly tan. How could that be? Today the park would be towel to towel with men, working on their own tans, much to the chagrin of the dog walkers, and the discomfort of the dogs themselves. Yet, at least half of those guys would be as glowingly white as I am. Maybe the tan skin of those smiling passers-by was the clue. They were tourists.

Jeff changed the subject to his mother, “You know she’s not as bad as Julia makes her out to be.”

“She’s not?” I replied.

“No, she just hates Julia. To be honest, my mother has hated all my girlfriends. I’m pretty sure she hates all women in general. She wants to be the center of attention all the time, at all costs, and I think she feels particularly threatened by Julia. After all, Julia is intelligent,
tall and beautiful. It was fine until we moved back into the area and my mother regained access to me, and my life. So, you’ve heard the stories?"

“A couple.”

“Did Julia tell you about the Christmas mom didn’t invite her to dinner?”

I had heard the story on multiple occasions, but Jeff wanted to talk. I answered, “No.” And he began. I returned to the jell-o. Wouldn’t it be too cold? After all you have to put all that ice in it to make it congeal. I can’t stand the cold and it doesn’t help most men I know. Who wants solid, cafeteria style jell-o anyway? Maybe that warm, almost congealed, just after a few ice cubes state would be best. Red, warm, liquid not-yet-jell-o sounded blissful. But would it fulfill the fantasy? Was the tactile, wet, slippery wiggle, part of the equation? Would the jell-o form around you as it cooled?

Do they make industrial sized packages of jell-o? Can you get, I guess it would be called institutionally sized servings? Does Costco sell monster boxes of jell-o? Cafeterias have to get it somewhere — what if it were government jell-o? Could the average citizen purchase it?

Does it have to be cherry flavored red jell-o, or does color outweigh taste? Would plain, dyed red with food coloring, do? Fairly large boxes of plain are available. And would food colored jell-o turn your body red? What a disaster. If so, could you get it off in time for work? And, what would you do with all that jell-o afterwards? You can’t just stand up and take a shower to wash the red residue away. You have to get rid of the bathtub full of jell-o first. What you would really need is a separate tub and shower.
Do female mud wrestlers ever wrestle in jell-o? I think I saw an ad for jell-o wrestling in the personals somewhere. Could Jeff just go and rent a jell-o wrestler’s pit. Or maybe he could climb in the jell-o pit with one of the female professional wrestlers. But I guess he would end up getting his ass kicked. Besides, there’s no actual sex in the public spectacle of wrestling. Maybe he’d do OK. Jeff doesn’t seem like the kind who would make the mistake of groping the girls, but instead would take the wrestling seriously.

The birds were chirping and the butterflies were out chasing each other around the empty lot turned community garden across the street and to the left of Jeff’s head. To the right of his head stood a very busy ice cream shop. Droves of people, mostly mothers with children, or teenage girls, entered, waited for their double scoop cones, then slowly turned to leave, wrapped up in the ice cream experience. The ice cream man was very cute and I could tell the girls took an extra long time deciding, and sampled several flavors before they made their final decisions. The store owner was a wise individual; his hiring skill had definitely helped the business.

Jeff was pretty cute himself. He could definitely work at the ice cream shop with his clean shaven, boyish charm. Not your stereotypical postgraduate degree in computers type o’ guy, and funny too. Not just a punster. But I guess stereotypes are just that. I took a sip of my coffee.

Jeff isn’t a homeowner, he rents. His bathtub couldn’t possibly be large enough for him, or let’s say it would be a happy accident if Jeff could fit into his own bathtub. Maybe some kind of special, extra large collapsible camp tub would do the trick. That way you wouldn’t have to worry about where to put the jell-o, how to dispose of it afterwards. You could just leave it out in the wilderness
for the deer and the ants. But what if an army of hungry, jell-o loving ants fell upon the bathtub full of jell-o as the act occurred. What an unpleasant distraction — attacked by ants.

Maybe he could rent a remote cabin with full amenities. Jeff had to have the money; he was a programmer. He could do it, rent a house near Shasta with a stove, a large bathtub, and separate shower, in the woods so he could empty the tub by the bucketful when he was done. But how long would it take to make all that jell-o? You’d have to have a humungous pot.

How about the bathtub stain, could he ever get it out? Maybe a kiddie pool would solve the stain problem, but a kiddie pool would never work for Jeff. It would not be the least bit comfortable. It’s not deep enough, the sides are too low for total submersion, they bend, and it’s not nearly wide enough. Jeff would definitely have a less than optimum jell-o experience even without the ants.

“So, what do you think?” he said, “Will you go with me to this potluck? My mother will be there, but it will be OK. I promise.” I looked up at his innocent eyes. He must have noticed the lines of concentration on my face. “Have you been listening to me? You seem so distracted today. Did you hear a word I said?”

“You want me to meet your mother?” I offered.

“It’s not like that. It’s Julia’s idea, really, you know she’s out of town. It’s a ruse to take the pressure off her. You come and pretend you’re with me. It makes my mom happy because you’re not Julia. There’s a good chance she’ll even be civil to you. And it takes the heat off of Julia for a bit because mom thinks she’s out of the picture.”

I began to wonder if you could drown in jell-o, or I guess it would be asphyxiation. Maybe a short bathtub would be a better, healthier model. Keep your head above the proverbial water.
“You seem distracted today,” Jeff repeated. “Tell me what it is? Is something wrong?”

“Well, I was just wondering, do you prefer plain red jell-o or jell-o one-two-three?”

“What?”

“You know that stuff with three layers, the bottom one being plain jell-o, the top whip cream-like stuff, and the middle something in between.”

Jeff said, “I never thought about the details of it silly, it’s just a fantasy I have.” He leaned across the table and squeezed my hand. “Now, won’t you help me out and go to this dinner with me tonight?”

A lone teenage girl left the ice cream shop with a single scoop cone. As soon as she got out the door she took one lick and the whole scoop of ice cream fell off the cone. She stared at the ground, greatly distraught. A large German Shepherd-like dog, led by a small woman, saw the opportunity, and against the will of the woman on the other end of the leash, slurped up the fallen ice cream. The girl’s despair turned into a smile, and then she cleared her face. No evidence of the smile remained as she turned and walked back into the shop holding her empty cone in the air. The counter guy smiled, his scoop already in his hand.