

UNREAL

The possibilities are endless.

BY JUDY HELFRICH

“Every time it’s them same damn nuts.” Mabel narrowed her eyes at the nut bowl on the coffee table. “D’you suppose it’s the same nuts what’s been out the last ten years?”

“One way to find out,” said Bertha. “Try one.”

The two sisters regarded the nuts.

“Nah,” said Mabel. “I ain’t that brave.”

“I’ve a hankering,” Bertha bit into a filbert, then raced into the kitchen, retching.

Iris emerged through the kitchen door. “What’s with her?”

“She had one a your nuts,” said Mabel. “How old would them things be?”

“Don’t matter how old. They ain’t real.”

“What are you on about?”

“Them scientists on the radio,” said Iris. “They’re in a tizzy about some discovery, saying none a this is real. That we’re playing out every little thing that never happened instead.”

“That’s a load a hooley.”

Bertha weaved in from the kitchen and toppled into an armchair, clutching her stomach.

“That’s how I felt last time I ate here,” said Mabel.

“Now I know this is unreal,” Iris said. “Cause I’d never have you two over in real life.” She huffed back into the kitchen.

A head popped through the living-room wall, to the left of the television. It leered at Bertha and Mabel with a sloppy grin and cloudy blue eyes.

Bertha surveyed the head with disgust. “Not only are you poisoned when you eat here, you got to put up with heads.”

Mabel tut-tutted. “You get them heads if you don’t keep a proper house.”

Bertha nodded. “You got to get after them heads; nip them in the bud.”

Another head broke through, just below the first.

“She’s lucky she don’t got blonds,” said Mabel. “Them redheads ain’t so bad.”

A blond head burst through the wall.

“Speak a the devil,” said Mabel.

Iris bustled into the living room. “Now them scientists are saying we’re in an unreality loop and things are gonna get weirder and weirder.”

“Iris,” said Bertha. “Don’t you think we’d notice if things was getting weird?”

“Heads!” Iris squawked. She rushed for a broom and beat the heads about the head.

The redheads screwed up their faces and withdrew. The blond took a bit more beating before it threw her a baleful look and popped back into the wall.

“You know where them heads come from,” said Mabel.

Iris eyed her.

“Spoilt food. Attracts ‘em.”

“Like them 20-year-old nuts,” said Bertha.



“It’s a wonder them heads ain’t thick like them roaches you had last year,” said Mabel.

“I never had roaches,” Iris spat.

“Member, Bertha? Iris left them dates out and you had half a one before it crawled away.”

“Yeah,” said Bertha. “Best thing I ever ate here.”

The two sisters cackled.

A brunette head popped through the coffee table and began feasting on the nuts.

“What’d I tell you,” said Mabel.

Iris issued a smack to the head. It growled at her. She whacked it a good one and it withdrew.

“You can’t go about thumpin’ them heads,” said Bertha. “You need proper head poison.”

“And for every head you see, there’s 50 more behind your walls,” said Mabel.

“You can start by tossin’ them nuts,” said Bertha.

“Them nuts is tradition,” said Iris.

“So’s the ptomaine you give us, but you don’t see us pining for it.”

A public-warning siren blared outside.

“Now what?” said Mabel. She clicked on the TV.

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“... stranger and stranger. For everything that happens,” said a scientist,

“almost infinite things don’t happen. Except they do. Everything that doesn’t happen in reality happens in unreality. That’s here. That’s us. We’re unused quantum superpositions. Uncollapsed wavefunctions. Unreal.” Bats blasted out of his ears. The scientist stared at them, wild eyed. “Is that normal? Because I can’t tell.” He drummed his fingers against a wandering dodo. “We can expect events to become more and more implausible until we exhaust every single possibility and the unreality loop collapses.”

“Pfft.” Mabel clicked off the television. “Our tax dollars at work.”

“You can’t keep 30-year-old nuts about,” said Bertha. “People want to sample them things, like I did.”

“Least it didn’t have legs,” said Mabel.

“You sure?” asked Bertha. “Them nuts is so old I thought they evolved some.”

Iris stormed back into the kitchen.

“You know,” said Mabel, observing a new head. “That one kinda looks like you.”

Another head popped through the wall.

“And that one looks like you,” said Bertha.

The Mabel-head bit the Bertha-head. Bertha grabbed Iris’s broom and walloped it. It gnashed at the broom and got a hold with its teeth. Bertha yanked the broom free, falling backwards and bashing her head against the coffee table.

The Bertha-head’s shoulders emerged from the wall.

Bertha twitched. She faded. She disappeared. New Bertha climbed out of the wall. She leered and shuffled towards Mabel.

Mabel pelted it with nuts. A filbert bounced off its eye, but it seemed not to notice. It grabbed Mabel by the throat and throttled her until she faded away.

New Mabel emerged from the wall.

Iris banged in from the kitchen.

The two of them faced Iris. They leered at her.

Iris leered back.

Then they sat around the coffee table and played pinochle.

Iris won. She ate a nut to celebrate.

“Every time,” said Mabel. “It’s them same damn nuts.” ■

Judy Helfrich is a writer and visual artist who hails from the Canadian prairie, where long stretches of nothing persist in at least four dimensions. More at helfrich.ca.

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