

## ***A MOST UNUSUAL EVENT***

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**T**HOMAS BIDDLE WAS THIRTY-EIGHT. He was a short man that was already going bald. He lived in a small apartment, in a crowded, small city, and worked in a small cubicle for a company that did work no one cared about, or understood. Every week day morning he would climb out of bed, get dressed, and eat a bran muffin on his way to his car. Then he'd climb into his small, falling apart, rusty, blue vehicle, and drive forty-five minutes in pretty much bumper to bumper traffic while listening to the only radio station his radio still picked up.

By the time he reached work, and parked in the parking garage, and climbed two flights of stairs to reach his floor, he was usually late, despite all his attempts at leaving early and taking alternate routes to work. He would climb the stairs, walk past the dingy cafeteria with only one light bulb, climb the next set of stairs, and walk sideways to squeeze between the cubicles to get to his own tiny cubby, where he would then squeeze in and sort of climb over his chair in order to sit at his desk.

Five to ten minutes after arriving, his boss would come by and scowl at him, and then continue on his rounds, to go bother his other employees. Needless to say, Thomas Biddle was not entirely happy with his life. So he started doing the one thing he could to stay sane. He doodled.

When no one was looking, which was fairly often since most people overlooked him, he'd pull some paper out of his desk and draw anything and everything he ever wanted or hoped for. He drew mountain cabins in lush landscapes of waterfalls and pine trees. He drew oceans with sailboats, and little islands with sandy beaches and exotic plants. He drew his boss sitting in a little cubicle with Thomas Biddle scowling down at him, and he drew himself, driving down the highway in a fiery red Ferrari. He doodled and doodled, and that is what helped him through each miserable day until he could go home.

When he'd given his eight paid hours for the day, and two or three unpaid, he'd slide sideways out from between the cubicles, walk down the stairs, go past the pathetic excuse for a cafeteria, walk down the next flight of stairs, climb in his car, and drive an hour in bumper to bumper traffic, listening to nothing because his radio didn't pick up anything at night, and go inside to his small apartment. He would then drop his dilapidated, held together with duck tape and luck, briefcase, and warm up a TV dinner. After a few hours of TV, he'd go to bed, and stare at the ceiling until he fell into a fitful sleep that usually involved dreams of his boss scowling at him.

The only change in this routine was weekends. For on Friday nights Thomas Biddle stayed up an extra hour or two, and did not go to work Saturday and Sunday. Instead, he often did work at home, after eating a blueberry muffin instead of a bran one. Then, when he was done sometime in the afternoon, he would often walk to the dark, smoggy, neighborhood park ten blocks away and feed the three pigeons that lived there with whatever muffin crumbs he had left from the week.

This went on day after day, week after miserable week, month after month after month, year after year, for nearly five years. It may have continued on for a much longer period of time if it had not been interrupted by a most unusual event.

Before I tell you about this event, as is my duty to do, being the narrator, I wish to make one thing perfectly clear. I am not crazy. Thomas Biddle was not crazy. And although you will in no way, being the sensible person that you are, believe most if any of what will follow, it did indeed happen, and that is why you should continue reading, even if this only leads to your laughing half-heartedly and forgetting this tale entirely.

It was a very ordinary Tuesday afternoon in May when Thomas Biddle, after returning from his fifteen minute sojourn to the cafeteria, where he'd eaten his customary peanut butter and jelly sandwich, sat down at his desk to do some serious doodling. He was feeling the affects of spring fever quite strongly and was hoping that drawing a peaceful meadow scene might alleviate his symptoms.

After drawing the beginnings of what promised to be a very peaceful picture, he was interrupted by what seemed to be a rather nasally voice coming from his desk drawer. He at first was so startled to hear a voice coming from his desk drawer that he missed what the voice had said. So it was indeed helpful when the voice repeated itself.

“Hey, somebody turn on the lights!” said the nasally voice.

Thomas Biddle sat in stunned awe for a few seconds, simply staring at the drawer. This time he'd understood what was said, but was wondering if perhaps some odd prank was being played on him. This seemed unlikely, however, because no one had ever played a prank on him before. He was such a nondescript character that even in grade school no one would have thought of him, to target for a prank, or for friendship. He thought it was more likely he had developed some sort of psychological problem that was causing him to hear voices.

“Hello! Hello? I know you're out there! Thomas Biddle, open this drawer!” demanded the nasally voice.

Thomas Biddle opened the drawer. Out popped a little cowboy character with a hat that was too big and kept falling down into his eyes so he couldn't see. He was not the sort of person you would expect to have a nasally voice. He looked like someone with a dashing, southern-accented-hero type voice.

“Well, finally! I thought I’d suffocate in that dark room!” declared the cowboy in relief, with the same nasally voice he’d used all along.

Thomas Biddle was bewildered and stunned at this turn of events. He didn’t even like Westerns, which was why he was having trouble believing he could have imagined up this realistic of a fellow. The cowboy even had spurs on his boots and a blue bandanna stuffed in his pocket. Thomas Biddle was trying to remember if he’d ever heard of cowboy’s putting bandannas in their pockets, because he’d always thought they’d tied them around their necks, to pull over their faces if they decided to become outlaws.

“I...umm... are you sure you’re real?” mumbled Thomas Biddle.

“What kind of stupid question is that?” replied the cowboy, someone affronted by this question.

“Well, I just thought maybe you were some type of hallucination or...” began Thomas Biddle.

“Or some stupid mirage in a desert? I’m standing here in front of you, aren’t I? Touch my hat; it’s real and so am I!”

Thomas Biddle touched the hat. It felt real. The cowboy looked real. He decided this might really be happening.

“Well, what I’m here for is to offer you an invitation to a party, to be held in your honor at the Cowbell saloon.”

“Oh. Wow. Really? I’ve never been to a party, except for my birthday parties. My parents were the only ones who came. They usually left early”

“That’s just pathetic. Why’d you have to tell me that? Well, we’re having a party, you’re invited, and it’s for you so you’d better come. That’s all I have to say.”

And with that, the little cowboy started to climb back into the drawer.

“Well, wait!” cried Thomas Biddle, “when is this party, and how do I get there?”

A muffled nasally voice came up out of the drawer as it was being pulled closed from the inside.

“Today at three, and you just jump in the drawer.”

And with that, the drawer closed. Thomas Biddle sat listening for a few moments to see if he heard anything else. Then he carefully and slowly pulled the drawer open. Inside was the usual assortment of things you’d expect to find in a desk drawer. There were pens, paper clips, scraps of paper, and his drawings. There was no cowboy. Thomas Biddle looked under every piece of paper, and in every nook and cranny of that drawer and desk, which was rather difficult in the confined space of his cubicle. He found nothing unusual. The cowboy was gone. But to where?

Rifling through his drawings one more time, just in case the cowboy was hiding between some of them, he saw something that caught his eye. It was a drawing he'd done a few months ago. It showed a wide open grassy prairie, with mountains in the distance. There was a little log cabin, with a dirt road meandering by, and far off near the mountains was what looked like a town of some kind. But what made him stop and look was first of all, the log cabin had a plume of smoke coming from the chimney. Second, in the far off town he could barely make out what seemed to be a sign attached to the front of one of the buildings. It was in the shape of a bell. What's more, he had no memory of drawing either the smoke or the sign. Something very odd was going on.

Looking slowly through his other pictures he noticed other small changes. The cabin near the waterfall had curtains in the window. The island had crabs on the beach, and the ocean picture no longer had just one sailboat, but two. Had someone been changing his drawings when he wasn't around? Why? Plus, as far as he knew, no one even knew he drew anything.

Gazing into space as one often does when one is thinking deeply, Thomas Biddle began to notice a slight movement out of the corner of his eye. He turned and looked at the picture of the island. Nothing moved. But just as he was about to go back to thinking he noticed there was now a starfish on the beach, one he knew hadn't been there a few moments before. What was happening?

He hardly dared think what he was thinking, but what he was thinking I'm sure has already occurred to you. The pictures were real somehow. They were moving, changing, all on their own. It was impossible. It was probably the most strange and stupid idea he had ever thought of. But...it did seem like a good explanation for what was happening.

But where had the cowboy come from? Things were moving in the pictures, yes, but that didn't explain the cowboy. Unless, of course, the cowboy was from one of the pictures. Could a character in a picture come to life and actually leave the picture it was from? Why not, if pictures are coming to life in the first place?

He opened up the drawer and put the papers back in and closed it. This was all so fantastic. Looking at his watch, he saw that it said it was 2:30. Of course, it was twenty minutes slow despite his having it repaired repeatedly, so it was really 2:50. The cowboy had said the party was at 3:00.

Thomas Biddle knew he was thinking crazy thoughts, but was starting to not worry so much about that. If he wanted, he could go to a party. A party held in his honor. But how could he go? How does one jump into a drawer twenty times too small to fit into? Maybe...if he got up in his chair and aimed carefully, perhaps he could make it onto the drawer. Then, well, if there was some type of phenomenon happening here, wasn't it possible it would shrink him somehow so he might fit in the drawer?

His watch now said 2:35. He only had five minutes before the party. Thomas Biddle took a deep breath, and thought about his life. He thought about commuting, and eating TV dinners, and walking up and down two flights of stairs. He thought about his scowling boss, and his sad childhood, and his lonely and boring thirty eight years of life. And he decided to do a perfectly ridiculous brave thing. He opened the drawer about half way, made sure the log cabin picture was on top, climbed on his chair, which drew only a few curious glances from his fellow workers, and jumped.

He arrived in a grassy meadow. He saw the log cabin to his left, and far in the distance, the town. He knocked on the door of the cabin and, to his surprise, was greeted by the cowboy. They walked together to the party, where he was late, like he was to most things. No one cared. Everyone was happy to meet their illustrator. He had a lovely time. And he was never heard from again.

No one noticed his disappearance, as his parents had passed away years before, except his boss, who came to scowl at him the next day and was surprised not to find him in his cubicle. After a few days he decided he had quit, and sold his car and pocketed the money.

The next employee to sit at his desk found his drawings quite amateur, and threw them away to make room for his own writings, which he fancied were becoming a novel. He never heard the voice of a nasally cowboy, and the drawer of the desk never again contained anything other than what it was expected to have.

