

Naked Homosexual Desert Caper



When the world is in session, **Ben Kawaller** makes funny videos for *Los Angeles magazine* and *Weherville*. He has alienated gay Republicans, witches, and men who like to have sex dressed as dogs.



Shortly after I moved to L.A., I fell in with a group of self-described “nudies,” an association of sexually permissive men who’d every so often get together to do various activities—hikes, barbecues, video gaming—naked. I don’t myself identify as a “nudie,” in that I do not ascribe any elevated meaning to the state of being naked; in fact, for all but a very small portion of my social interactions, I would much rather *not* be naked. This minor difference aside, though, I felt I could be a terrific asset to the nudie culture.

It was with high hopes that, one summer day, I decided to join thirty or forty nudies on a naked excursion to Deep Creek Hot Springs, which is somewhere in the Mojave Desert near San Bernardino. The Facebook-based invitation to the outing was, I noted, coyly averse to any overt sexuality. But I could read between the lines: what else could “a day of appreciating beauty” mean if not that I was in store for a mind-blowing outdoor gang-bang with my new best friends and future husband?

The plan was to carpool to the hiking spot, and we were to meet at the driver’s place at 9 a.m. I’d realized the night before, however, that this timetable left little time after waking to have a fully satisfying spell in the bathroom, and in anticipation, I’d

taken an overnight laxative. By 8:45 in the morning, though, it had yet to produce any results, and I left the house with a great sense of foreboding. I tried to put this matter out of my mind and focus on befriending my carpool companions.

The driver, Rick, was an impossibly hunky twenty-five-year-old with shaggy blond hair who held a genuine interest in surfing. We’d be riding in his SUV; we’d need four-wheel drive for this journey, the kind of rugged power a guy like Rick could provide. The other guy was an equally dreamy thirty-something who I realized upon greeting was my eye doctor.

I hugged them both hello, then started disrobing. Rick stopped me with an almost insulting urgency, then helpfully noted that we wouldn’t be getting naked until we’d hiked down to the springs. I pulled up my pants and got in the car.

Now, I have nothing against gorgeous people, but I need a little less facial symmetry than Rick and the doc were sporting for me to behave like a normal human being. You’d think that in situations like these, when whatever beauty I have is neutralized by way of comparison, I’d try to mitigate things by turning on the charm. Instead, these seem to be

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only situations in which I am sufficiently petrified to assume an air of aloofness. So with Rick driving and Dr. Hynes in the passenger seat, I sat in the back, where I pretended to be uninterested in either of them and obsessed over when I might next see a toilet.

An hour and a half later, we arrived in the middle of a dusty, hot landscape that gave way to a winding and rocky trail that led down into a ravine. There did not appear to be a restroom for miles, aside of course from the vast open restroom that is the natural world. I was, I realized, a ticking time bomb en route to an orgy.

We started along the trail, the mid-morning sun already punishing. I soon fell into a reverie over the possibility of a future with Rick, despite his giving every indication of having a personality disorder. "I don't really care about other people," he'd confessed at one point, tossing his phenomenal hair and sending my loins into agony. "I think when you meet the right person you'll care," I said, affecting emotional stability. I would save him, beautiful anti-social Rick; he would come to love me, the man who would finally make him realize his capacity for basic empathy. He did not respond, having evidently lost interest in the conversation.

We finally reached the springs, where a growing contingent of nudies luxuriated on a sandy strip that lay before several natural pools.

"When do we have sex?" I asked my eye doctor.

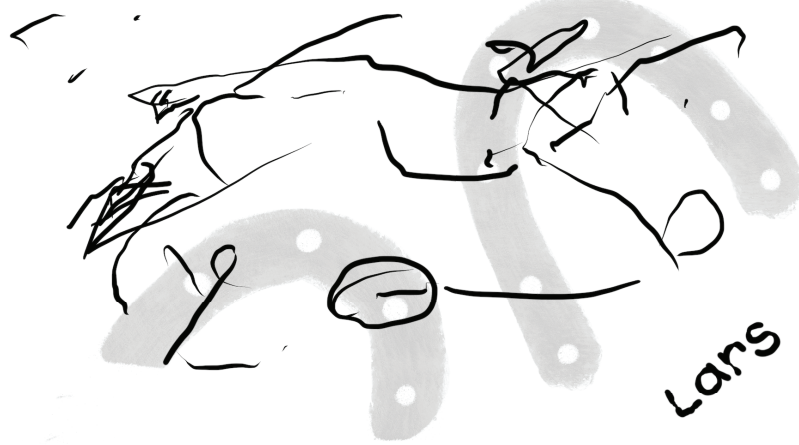
"I think today is more about enjoying the scenery," he said, and I began to worry I'd made a terrible mistake.

I was in for another rude and sorry surprise at the base of these mountains: other people. Straight people. Now, in nearly all settings, women and heterosexual men are two of my favorite social groups, but they were a most unwelcome presence here. It didn't matter that they were also naked—they'd cast a decidedly asexual pall. Which meant that there were three dozen naked Los Angeles homosexuals at my disposal and hours to fill with...conversation.

I took off my clothes. It was the first time I'd ever been naked in public, maybe even the first time I'd been naked outdoors. I wish I could say I was overcome by some profound psychic shift, that I suddenly understood the brotherhood of...nudity? Mainly, I found it unnerving to be in a social setting without any pockets. I had never realized how much my pockets had soothed me until this day; I felt adrift without them. I asked around, but nobody else was having any pocket withdrawal. I was having trouble



HORSE DRAWN CARRIAGE



finding other topics of discussion.

I turned to two guys, a twenty-something who looked about fifteen, and a strong-jawed guy around my age, and remarked to the older one that his teeth, which were remarkably white, were remarkably white. He flashed me a smile that flipped my stomach and told me they were entirely fake, and for a moment I wondered how much trouble it would be to have all of my teeth knocked out and replaced with such an arresting set of veneers.

"What do you do?" I ventured.

"I'm in luxury real estate," he said.

"What about you?"

"I'm a talent-agency hireling," I said, hoping to impress him with an SAT word. He did not seem floored by me.

I glanced at the kid, who was nonchalantly holding his leg behind his head. "What about you?" I asked.

"I'm an acrobat," he replied, and I hurled silent curses at the oblivious sunbathing heterosexuals who had ruined the afternoon.

I made my way down to the water, where Rick was attracting an audience. He had managed to get himself wedged into an inflatable circular tube he'd sat in, and he was now bent over and tottering around on the beach, feigning helplessness. Somehow, the naked men surrounding him were able to experience this display as a delightful bit of physical comedy, rather than as the visual torture it actually was, given that it seemed unlikely that Rick would be

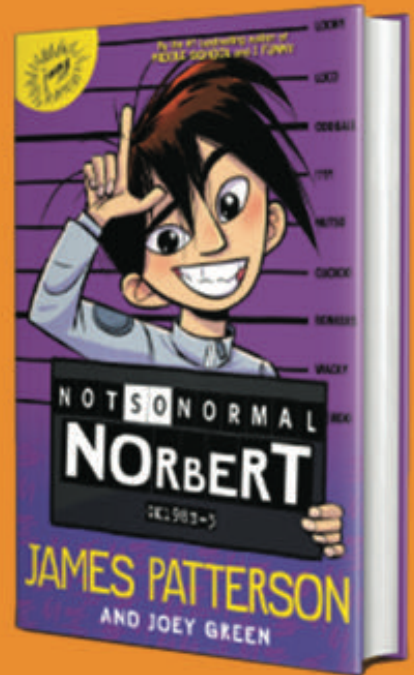
following up this routine by passing himself around for us all to molest. Certainly not with the goddamn cast of *Friends* forty feet away.

How much longer did we have to stay here? What was the appeal of nakedness without gratification? I was having the same feeling I get around go-go boys, whose job seems to be to alert everyone to the fact that they are not having sex with them. For that we pass out dollar bills? For this I schlepped across Judea?

Not willing to give up on the dream, I joined a subsection of the group and ventured off to another, more private beach that turned out to be free of humanity—now was surely the moment! But it was also the moment when I finally felt the visceral stirrings I'd hoped to induce before leaving the house that morning. I realized then that I had a choice between seeing how things panned out with this secluded cadre of naked boys...and doing what had to be done. Defeated by nature, I made my way back to the main camp, where I proceeded to dazzle the crowd with all the sexual vivacity that comes from asking around for a roll of toilet paper.

That procured, I started climbing up into the wilderness in search of a place to relieve myself. Though there was ample shrubbery, there seemed to be no spot that did not look down upon the beach. It seemed to me that should any of these nudies chance to train his eye on the hill behind them, he would surely spot me amidst the grandeur of nature,

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horrifically marking my territory. So I walked up and up, knowing that every step I took was a step farther from the whole reason I'd subjected myself to this harrowing pilgrimage.

This was very far from the scenario I'd envisioned when I'd pictured an afternoon of naked frolicking. I could hear the occasional peal of laughter from the people by the water, people who seemed genuinely to be enjoying themselves. Then, as if in jealous protest, I unleashed unto the earth an intestinal monstrosity as vile and wretched as any produced by man or nature, an unspeakable assault on all things good and holy, an atrocity whose very being seemed to confirm the bleakness of existence itself. The afternoon had reached a low point.

By the time I returned to the water, everyone was back on the main beach. "Was there an orgy?" I asked the acrobat.

"No," he said. "It doesn't always happen."

It was a small but welcome comfort to know that I hadn't missed out on group sex so I could go number-two on the side of a mountain.

But then—if not sex, what were these people doing with each other?

"We talked," said the acrobat. "Hung out."

I stared at him blankly, then asked for his number. Reaching for my phone, I found only my bare thigh.

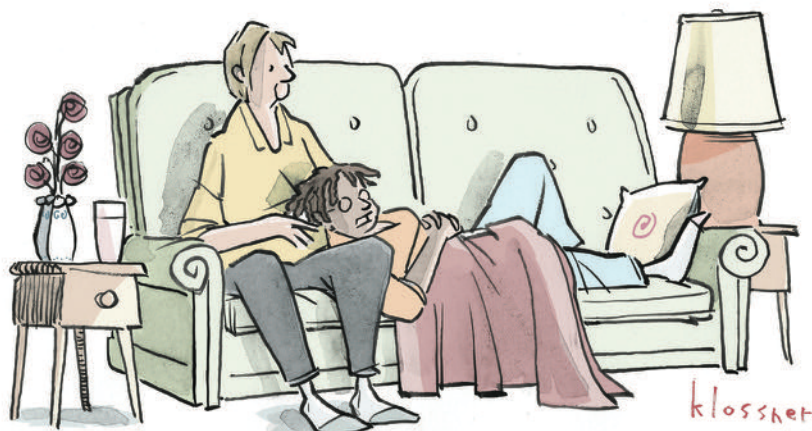
The hike back up the mountain was more dispiriting than the hike down, given that the only possible intimacy

waiting at the end was a car ride to civilization with Rick and my eye doctor. Stopping at the top, someone commented on the magnificent view. I turned to look down at the canyon we'd just climbed out of. Half-shaded by the afternoon sun, it looked far less scorched and dry than it had hours before, the rolling hills criss-crossing as they descended into shadow. Above us, like always, was the absolute blueness of our sky. The whole thing was, in fact, majestic. I hadn't noticed.

"Did you have fun?" Dr. Hynes asked as we buckled ourselves back into sturdy Rick's SUV.

"Not really," I told him, feeling I should be honest with my doctor. I probably should have said, "Yes, what a beautiful day!" But I didn't have the energy. Hiking is exhausting, and so is pretending to be an adventure-loving free spirit when all you want to do is lie down—preferably with someone else.

Iam still not sure what the point of our sexless nudity was. I suppose that when you're stripped bare, there's an immediate intimacy you don't get in normal life. I wish I could say that, in such a state, I was able to open myself up to something beyond anxious small talk with a bunch of people with whom I likely had few things in common. I wish I could say that the nudies made me feel free, or "at one with nature," or like I was sharing in some fraternal bond. But I didn't feel any of those things. I just felt naked. **B**



"I didn't know you could finish Netflix."