



A Jacket's Sentimental Ties

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Whenever a dinner or party conversation begins to spin and sputter its wheels on the subject of what a character this person is, or what a rogue Charlie So-and-So is, I'm forced to narrate, in thorough detail, the all-together true happenings of my run-in one autumn weekend with quite veritably the World's most shameless scoundrel:

Greebald Duffy was soaking up a considerable amount of my liquor with a considerable amount of my food when my wife introduced me. If you are the type who puts any sort of stock in first impressions, I recall immediately thinking: "Dear, me."

I tried hard not to pull a face.

At a glance, Mr. Duffy looked to be on the less fortunate side of 40, with a tremendous arcing paunch and matching posture. He might have been a middle manager at Sears. He might have even been a traveling salesman of some kind. He was most certainly *not* a tailor.

Politeness being a point of pride with me, I strained to cork these harmless prejudices—I smiled brightly, tossed Greebald my hand, and earnestly inquired as to his well being.

Shaking off my pleasantries, however, Mr. Duffy boisterously and quite aberrantly informed me that the best way to save money at "one of these parties" was simply to put cheap liquor into fancy bottles.

A bit dazed, I withdrew my hand as a blithe Mr. Duffy siphoned off his drink and deftly funneled my most expensive bottle of brandy into a pocket flask.

I stood stunned.

In place of my retort, Duffy barreled forth in the vein of conversation he had so brazenly started, confidentially assuring me that, "No one can tell the difference." At this point, to punctuate his sentiments, Greebald offered me a jarring nudge to the ribs and waited, as though for the forthcoming display of my appreciation.

This unnerving aplomb of Mr. Duffy's—modesty forces me to admit—served to silence my wide-held voluble nature until I was finally able, after a few brief moments, to stutter out that it was, after all, only money between friends.

To this he immediately snorted, "Mind cutting me a check then?"

I scoffed. *Openly.*

This was clearly not a conversation worth continuing, and noticing that our exchange was soliciting attention from nearby guests, I decided it wise to exit, however unceremoniously.

Danger, as I always say, trumps dignity.

"It's in the mail, Mr. Duffy," I craned backward, steering myself to friendlier and more familiar circles.

Through casual conversations with casual acquaintances, I ascertained that Greebald Duffy was the nephew of one of my wife's friends—although I'm puzzled why anyone would admit that fact. I also discovered that he had lost a considerable amount of money, derived solely from inheritance, on a pyramid scheme in which he was distinctly the obtuse angle.

Mr. Duffy was not well-esteemed, even by self-ascribed friends. It appears he had a nasty habit of popping over unannounced and shrilly weeping until a comfortable sum of money was borrowed—although, the enunciation of "borrowed" led me to believe that Duffy rarely, if ever, returned the favor.

If you'll allow me to editorialize, I found Greebald Duffy to be an odious whelp of a man, a conclusion in concord with the rest of the party. He was—most likely still is—inexcusably short, incorrigibly heavysset, and undeniably balding in an undistinguished way—prompting the well-suited nickname, Greebaldy. Rather than wear spectacles, he squinted profusely. Those in proximity were blessed if his torrential sneezes were blocked by his shirtsleeves. Unless discussing money, he was extraordinarily hard of hearing—inducing me to label him, much to the party's delight, Greebald Deafy. He smelled entirely worse than he looked.

Not all of this is opinion, you understand. Fact: Greebald Duffy at once stirred up feelings of pity and feelings of hatred for pitying such an awful man. Beyond matters of appearance, one could say that his decorum's fabric—if you will allow me some figurative flourishes—was unfit for his own shabby suit.

Perhaps you think I'm being unduly hard on Mr. Duffy? This I'll admit: Greebald could be considered fairly...intriguing—perhaps even to the point of captivating. At times I felt inclined to forgive the faults that he so brashly displayed.

A fault acknowledged, as I always say, is a fault redeemed.

And, while Mr. Duffy did not technically or verbally acknowledge his personality's foibles, he so keenly and punctually demonstrated

them that one got the impression that, at least subconsciously, he was ceaselessly admitting his failure, ad nauseam.

Yet, just when this strand of pity began creeping up, I would catch Mr. Duffy in the act of atrocity. Just when I was poised to disregard his abominable manners or his unsightly appearance, Greebald Duffy would astound me by conspicuously and all-too-frequently blinking at my wife's chest—done, of course, while matting his greased fingers on the nearest and always most expensive piece of upholstery.

In short: With regard to a man like Greebald Duffy, there is absolutely nothing to do with him except have absolutely nothing to do with him.

I'm afraid I've gotten off track. Back to the party:

Overall—despite my tiff with Duffy—the evening was a smashing success. And that's not a term I wing around lightly, either. Oliver Hensley *personally* congratulated me and my wife on throwing the “party of the season.” I heard, secondhand, that Mary Burnam thought it “first-rate fun.” Modesty prohibits me from publishing the remaining compliments—but, suffice it to say, there were others.

All in all, it wasn't until around midnight or one that my soiree spilled out into the chilly November night. I, as my hosting duties dictated, was working the door and, on occasion, jokingly bragging about my short commute home. I can be quite a riot when I've had a few in me.

I'd be lying if I told you I hadn't spent some of my time at the door keeping an eye out for our dear friend Duffy, but he failed to show. I was forced to conclude that he had made a boorish exit earlier in the night, unnoticed. Feelings of both relief and regret swarmed inside of me—I had been looking forward to heckling him from my house with a patented, “Have a nice life, Deafy.” Trying, however, to focus on the successes of the night, I climbed my stairs for bed a weary but contented man.

I awoke in the morning to both my wife's gentle prodding and a prodigious headache. I've never been accustomed to drinking large amounts and was therefore left with the gathering clouds of a hangover.

My wife, seemingly disinterested in my condition, continued to bully me awake with the news that I had a telephone call. Without the headache my suspicions would have arisen sooner: It was 10 o'clock on Sunday. Anyone with a shred of manners doesn't choose such a time for telephone calls. Grabbing the receiver and softly coughing up a hello, I heard the absolute most chilling words in the world: “I believe I have something that belongs to you.”

It was, all too naturally, Greebald Duffy, who rather vaguely explained that he had “mistakenly” grabbed my jacket last night and was “eager” to deliver it back to me. Of course, Duffy's understanding of deliver was sizably different from my own, as he wondered aloud if I would be able to meet him *downtown* for the exchange.

Point of interest: The word “exchange” was aspirated in the selfsame way that guests had highlighted the word “borrowed” when discussing Greebald's house calls.

Despite my pleas for a meeting sometime Monday, Duffy insisted upon a lunchtime handoff. He proceeded to jubilantly describe my jacket in intimate detail, as though to entice me to its speedy recovery. Example: “It has three interior silk-lined pockets, correct?” Suits are, may I say, something I pay remarkably little attention to. But, people describing suits? That would test the patience of a wristwatch.

To further persuade, Mr. Duffy, in an altogether waggish tone, made recurring references to an “interesting photograph” that he had—once again “mistakenly”—uncovered. With a wince, I comprehended precisely which jacket and photograph our friend Duffy was so enthusiastically referring to. An accidental *goddammit* may have escaped my lips. Either way, I quickly acquiesced to Duffy's offer of a noon-time meeting. One does not, after all, haggle over a jacket with such sentimental ties.

After begrudgingly asking for directions, I inquired quite sincerely as to what *his* jacket looked like, in order to bring the correct one to the exchange.

“My jacket?” Greebald asked, thoroughly annoyed. “What on earth are you talking about?”

In a flash, I got a strikingly clear picture of Greebald Duffy.

Perhaps I should take a moment to clarify why, exactly, Mr. Duffy was so excited to be in possession of my jacket—or, perhaps, moreover, the content of the photograph in question. I am not, by any account, an immoral man. On the contrary, most people find me refreshingly righteous. I never cheat in business, at cards, or on my wife.

However, as I said before, I'm not in the habit of drinking in large amounts—a fact that *testifies* to the temperance of my character—and therefore there are rare times when my behavior becomes...questionable. Yes, questionable is indeed the word: Nothing more, maybe less. As such, Greebald Duffy was not sitting on any concrete proof of poor conduct or infidelity, merely something that might raise a significant number of questions

concerning my intentions, if not my actions. Questions I didn't feel like answering.

Would my wife believe such a woman was merely sitting on my lap? Perhaps, perhaps not. Women can be, let's face it plainly, rather imaginative—something even a bookie wouldn't wager against. And I never gamble. Clearly, you can see my dilemma and why, at 11 o'clock on a Sunday morning, with an orchestral headache, I ventured downtown to meet Mr. Duffy.

Allow me to say, *purely* as a matter of public record, that an agèd groundhog could have given more precise directions than Mr. Greebald Daffy—who knotted and weaved me through a series of garbled shortcuts that left me impatiently asking recurring pedestrians just where in the hell the Drink and Dive Tavern was!

This from a man who never swears.

It took roughly two hours to find the place Duffy had specified, and I got the distinct impression he was at the moment laughingly describing this machinated ordeal to anyone who would listen—an impression that was firmly cemented when I caught him chumming it up with the bar hand.

A few, quick words about the Drink and Dive Tavern: The place smelled like a dilapidated dairy farm—a peculiar mixture of mold and manure. The only discernable source of light came from regulars setting their volley of cigarettes aflame. One had to pole-jump over heaps of downed drunkards.

Striking a match, I located Mr. Duffy and bushwhacked my way to the dining area, scattering change as a diversionary tactic.

As I walked over, I overheard Greebald recounting the time a lady had informed him of his “terrible view of women.” Anticipating the punch line, I gripped the bar as Greebald unabashedly sang out, “So, I asked her to send another one in and I'll take a look at her!”

This had been a popular joke from last night's party. One deftly told—and lived—by my good friend and co-worker, Les Markmen. Duffy's impudence was astounding—somebody, I thought, should really do something about it. *I* did not, however, have the time or inclination to oust Mr. Duffy as a plagiarizer to some nondescript soda jerk. So, after the laughter subsided, I simply nodded, ordered a double shot of bourbon, and took my rather sticky seat.

The table, let me say, was covered with *several* half-eaten plates of food and empty pint glasses—as though Duffy had been marooned there for weeks, after first enduring a formidable hunger strike.

“Did you find the place all right?” Duffy asked, quite smugly.

To this I immediately snorted, “I most certainly did *not*. Your directions couldn't have been worse if they were to China.”

Realizing my mistake in tone, however, I quickly redirected the conversation to my jacket. “I'm very pleased to have my jacket returned to me, though.”

“I bet,” scoffed Greebald.

“That jacket, you see, has sentimental ties. It's very important to me.”

“Oh, I bet.”

“How is it, exactly, that you mistook it for your own?”

“Oh, you know—just grabbed the wrong one.”

I most certainly did *not* know. I have been alive for 43 and one-half years, been to more dinner parties than modesty permits me to say, and have never, ever grabbed the wrong jacket. Still, tact caught the rougher side of my tongue:

“And, Mr. Duffy” I began evenly, “what became of your jacket?”

“Guess I forgot to bring mine after all. How silly, huh?”

This was perhaps the sole point upon which Greebald and I agreed.

“It's a very nice jacket,” Duffy mused absently. “Did I mention the photograph?”

“You said something.”

“*Very risqué.*”

To punch up his point, Greebald took the photograph out and glanced at it admiringly.

“Did your wife take this?”

“No. She was absent. In California at the time.”

“Oh, well...perhaps she'd like to see what she missed.”

“That's quite enough of that, Mr. Duffy. Would you please give me my jacket and photograph back?”

“Oh, I didn't realize the *photograph* also had...what was it? Oh,

yes...sentimental attachment.”

“Sentimental *ties*, Mr. Duffy. And I don’t see how that is any of your business.”

“Business! What an apropos time to bring up business!?!”

I was certainly beginning to see what Greebald had in mind when he said the word “exchange” over the phone.

“Mr. Duffy,” I sighed brusquely, “I’m afraid I don’t seem to see what you have in mind.”

“Well, I don’t know about you, but when someone recovers something of *mine* with sentimental ties, there’s usually a reward involved.”

“May I remind you, Mr. Duffy, that you did not *recover* my jacket, so much as lose it on my behalf? This is, for all intents and purposes, extortion.”

“No, this is, after all,” Duffy burred—in rather a mocking tone, if you will allow me to editorialize—“just a little money between friends.”

There was plainly no need to delve further in discussion.

“Very well. How much, Mr. Duffy?”

“Two hundred.”

“Done.”

“And fifty.”

“Done, Mr. Duffy.”

Deciding that I was getting out of this cheaply, I quickly cut him a check for two hundred and fifty dollars, and we exchanged our respectively desired items. I recall Duffy immediately groused over receiving a personal check, and he may have at one point, under his breath, asked to see my driver’s license.

As for my jacket: Despite my quite mitigated inquiries, Mr. Duffy remained vigilantly unresponsive about a peculiar stain mottling the right sleeve. Instead, swilling down the remainder of his beer—and extolling the possibility that we might yet be friends!—Greebald, in obvious high spirits, informed me that he had to use the “little boy’s room” before settling the restaurant bill. My objection to this order of events went wholly unnoticed and, abjectly, I slumped in my chair and ordered another bourbon.

After an excruciatingly long wait of thirty minutes or so—during which I found ample time to correctly explain the origin of “Mr. Duffy’s” story to the barkeep—I got the not-too-sneaking suspicion that Duffy had no plans on returning. That he had, in actuality, skipped out on his tab, leaving me the fiscal responsibility for his feast.

Exhausted and resigned to defeat, I dropped fifty dollars—on *four* different entrees—cursed my miserable luck, and, intent on getting my money’s worth, toddled off to use the gentlemen’s facilities before my long drive home.

Upon entering the bathroom, I was immediately struck by the sight of Greebald Duffy’s wedged, gabardine-clothed body lodged a little less than halfway thru the absurdly-small window of the Drink and Dive Tavern’s men’s room.

Duffy must have sensed the presence of someone other than himself. But, contrary to what I might have imagined, he didn’t begin screaming for help, offering up some poorly-contrived excuse of rescuing a wounded bird. Instead, his body sort of tensed up, as though poised for a spanking—or as if to become less conspicuous, despite the overall physical impossibility of such a feat. It is, after all, *quite* difficult for a 240-pound man barreled in a bathroom window to seem at all inconspicuous—much more difficult than, say, for a 240-pound man to pass himself thru a bathroom window in the first place.

A serene feeling of joy pounded inside me; the words were out of my mouth before I knew it:

“Justice, Mr. Duffy,” I excitedly pointed out, “seems to have a tiny bladder.”

With that—and a jarring swat on his caboose—I pried my freshly-minted check from Duffy’s trouser pocket, wondering aloud if Greebald and I might yet be friends indeed.

At that moment, if I’m to be honest, I certainly thought so.

In a flash, I stormed out of the lavatory, removed my fifty dollars from the barroom table, politely asked the bartender for another shot of bourbon, and—siphoning off my drink—told him the outstanding news:

“The gentlemen lodged in your bathroom window will be footing today’s bill,” I said, in obvious high spirits, and walked ceremoniously out the door.