



MIMES

by

Scott A. Johnson

MIMES

Jack brooded over the days events as he walked toward home. He'd gotten up late because the alarm clock was set for 6:30 p.m., not a.m., been bawled out by his boss because of his consequential tardiness, and things just deteriorated afterward. His latest client wouldn't listen to him and insisted on dragging an unwinnable case out in court, which threatened another blemish on his somewhat impressive record. Lawyers weren't supposed to have bad days. They were supposed to cause them for other people. When five o'clock finally rolled around, he discovered his wallet missing, which made him unable to pay for a cab ride. His mood grew more sour with every trudging step.

He decided to cut across Central Park to get to his house, an old brownstone with spacious rooms. He'd bought the thing when he first moved to Manhattan Island because it was close to his office and, for the salary the firm

paid him, he wasn't about to live like some middle class apartment renter.

He cleared the outer wall of the park and paused as he looked around. Central Park was no place to walk alone after dark, but there were still a few hours of daylight left, more than enough time to get home. He could easily avoid trouble if he just stayed on the official path.

He'd not gone halfway through the park when he saw the Mimes doing their shtick for the other passers by. He felt his disgust at seeing them resurface.

Jack hated Mimes.

To him, they were the lowest part of society. They did nothing but walk against imaginary wind and pull non-existent ropes to panhandle for change that poor suckers tossed to them. He doubted any of them had homes and bet they used whatever meager change was given to buy some sort of drug that would help perpetuate their hallucinations of invisible boxes and other such nonsense. Also, he found them disturbing, the way they always smiled wide-eyed and never spoke. Were it up to him, he'd have them all arrested and put on trial for something, anything, so he could defend the whole lot of them in court. Though he liked to think of himself as one of the best lawyers in the state, he would gladly lose that case on purpose just to see them all sent to prison.

He hurried toward the outer edge of the park, and almost breathed a sigh of relief, when he noticed one of the Mimes following him. He turned to look at the leotard-clad stalker, who stopped, smiled grotesquely, and gave him a snappy cartoonish wave.

“Leave me alone,” said Jack, just loud enough for the Mime to hear him, then he turned to walk away.

He hadn’t taken five more steps when he realized that the hideous beast still followed him. It mimicked every movement, every gesture, with grotesque overexaggeration. His arm swing, his gait, even the way he stopped became something of ridicule. Again he turned to face the Mime.

“Look,” he said through a forced smile. “I’ve had a very bad day, I don’t have any money to give to you. Now go away.”

The Mime made an exaggerated sad face and balled his hands over his eyes as though crying, then wiped his gloved palms across his mouth to reveal that same sickening smile they all wore.

“Cute,” said Jack. “Very cute. Now go away.”

He turned his back on the bug-eyed grinning idiot and started off toward his home again. The Mime, not deterred, pranced along behind him in obscenely exaggerated ballet steps.

“I’m warning you,” muttered Jack under his breath.

Jack took two more steps when he felt the gloved hand of the Mime fall on his jacket.

"That's your last mistake," he shouted as he whirled around and connected with a vicious fist to the Mime's nose. Something inside him snapped. All the day's frustrations, his client, his wallet, and now *this* asshole? Bad enough street performers clogged the city with stupidity and panhandling, but for one to lay a hand on him was too much. He reached down and took the man by his shirt and pulled him close to his face.

"You people are a bunch of Goddamned freaks!" he screamed, spittle flying into the Mime's face. Again Jack's fist landed against the Mime's cheek, sending him sprawling back to the asphalt. "You're worse than rats!" He kicked the fallen Mime in the ribs with crackling results. "You plague this city," Jack yelled, kicking him in the ribs again, "and you make me sick!" A final kick and the Mime lay before him, bloodied and gasping for breath.

Jack felt his violence subside, but not his loathing. He reached into his suitcoat pocket and flung a business card at the fallen man.

"If you ever need a lawyer," he said snidely, "look me up. I'm the best in the business."

He turned to walk away, then couldn't resist a final barb.

“Oh yeah,” he said. “Get a job.”

He felt better, as if the day’s troubles eased with every blow. No one would care. Police didn’t file assault charges against people for beating up Mimes. And even if they did, the stupid bastard touched him first. It was self-defense. At least, he could plead so, and most likely get off. He walked away with a spring in his step. He didn’t see the other Mimes as they slunk out of the bushes and down the sidewalk to come to the aid of their fallen brother.

The first by his side gently cradled the fallen one’s head against his breast, took notice of the blood he spat up as he tried to breathe. As their numbers grew, more than a dozen painted faces looked with burning eyes down the path in the direction Jack had gone.



Jack arrived home in a far better mood than when he left work. What a wonderful way to end his day. That Mime had it coming as far as Jack was concerned, and maybe he and his sissy buddies would think twice about laying a hand on good and hard working people again. As far as he was concerned, he’d done the city a service.

He unlocked the door and was greeted by his purring orange tabby.

“Hiya Justice.” He smiled as he picked the large feline up. “Guess what Daddy did today?”

Hours later, after dinner for both himself and the cat, he sat with a glass of wine in his leather easy chair, and listened to Mozart as he pet his cat in the dim light.

“Heh,” he said to the cat. “Y’know, the funny thing was, even while I was beating him up, that damned Mime never made a sound! I guess they really can’t talk.”

Justice purred as he stroked his fur again. Jack picked up his cat and walked upstairs to bed. His terrible day turned out better than expected. He had a few things to tell his client and his boss in the morning, and he was feeling quite invincible. He put the cat on the bed and took off his trousers and shirt. “G’night Justice,” he said as he crawled beneath the sheets and switched off the light.



Jack awoke early, rested and satisfied with a good night’s sleep. He yawned and stretched and lazily rolled out of bed. He felt a little odd, fuzzy-headed, but that he attributed to residual sleepiness. It would wear off as soon as he got some coffee and got moving. He took a long shower and shaved, neatly combed his hair and dressed in a dark wool suit. The memory of the previous day’s events still brought a smile to his lips.

With thoughts of having Mimes banned from the park and city racing through his mind, Jack went down the stairs where he found Justice waiting by the door.

“Good-bye, Justice,” he said as he reached to stroke his cat’s head.

The cat laid its ears back and hissed, raised the fur on its back. Just as Jack’s hand got within petting distance, the cat slashed at it with its claws and yowled.

Jack pulled his hand back in surprise.

“What’s gotten into you?” he said.

As if in answer, the cat spat again, then ran to hide under the leather easy chair.

“Weird cat,” Jack muttered under his breath. He pulled his hat and overcoat from the hat tree and put them on as he turned and opened his front door.

Across the street from his house, a Mime leaned against nothing. Jack froze. It looked different from the other Mimes in the park. Where their smiles and faces were often somnambulistic, this one’s eyes burned. His smile was just a little too wide, his teeth yellow in comparison to the starkness of his face. His firey eyes gave Jack goose flesh to feel their malignant weight on him.

The Mime gave Jack an exaggerated wave hello.

“What the hell do you want?”

The Mime raised two fingers, as a child might when talking about scissors. He pointed at Jack, then snipped his fingers across his own throat. Jack clutched his throat as he felt pain in his larynx.

“What the hell...?” he wanted to say, but when he opened his mouth no sound would emerge.

His puzzled look sent the Mime into convulsions of silent laughter and he stood, soundlessly slapped his knees and doubled over. The Mime then skipped across the street toward him. Jack felt the fear rise up within him, chilling his blood in his veins. He began to walk briskly away, around the block and away from his devilish looking stalker. As he walked, he kept glancing over his shoulder to see if the grinning menace was still behind him. To his dismay, it was, and it kept perfect time with his step. He rounded the corner and felt the hat lifted from his head. He whirled around to see three more Mimes perched in the doorway beside him. They too waved at him, either by broad gesture or by wiggling fingers, and they too smiled that same malevolent smile. The one in the middle, the largest of the three, donned Jack’s hat and gave it a rakish tilt, all the while smiling at him demonically.

Jack’s heart raced. It couldn’t be happening. Corralled and terrorized by a street gang of Mimes? Who’d ever heard of such a thing? They outnumbered him, but what could they really do? A bunch of skinny, tight-clad poofs? Nothing, he hoped.

Again Jack resumed his course, but much more quickly. He half jogged to the next corner with all four of

the painted monsters in close pursuit. As he rounded the next corner, he almost fell over himself as he tried to stop at the sight before him. Another pack of Mimes stood at the end of the block, and upon seeing him, began their slow advance. Each of them walked differently, but they all had the same menacing gestures, the same air of evil. His only exit was the park. He would have to cut through Central Park to get away from them and try to blend in. Then, after he'd lost them, he reasoned, he'd go to the police and have them all thrown in jail.

He made for the gate at a dead run, as cold sweat poured down his forehead and neck. If they caught him, he was sure they would kill him. Street people lived by different rules. They had no laws, no real homes. They were not even real people to Jack.

From behind every bush and bench leapt still more Mimes to torment him. Had he his voice, he'd have screamed. As he ran past a lightpost, another Mime swung out and snatched hold of him by the collar of his coat. Jack wriggled out of it and fell to the ground, still trying to gain ground away from his pursuers. He looked up at the one who had his coat. It stared back at him, swinging his coat overhead, his mouth open in silent laughter.

With great effort, Jack righted himself and ran down the path. He looked behind him to see that the number

of Mimes in pursuit had grown. There were more than twenty white faces, and with each step their ranks swelled. His feeling of panic increased as he passed the edge of the clearing that was the center of Central Park. Jack's heart pounded, but it almost stopped as he saw thirty Mimes lined up before him, blocking the exit. They smiled in unison and began the slow but terrifying creep toward him. The Mimes behind him had stopped running and took slow deliberate steps. Jack whirled about, frightened and confused. He lashed out at the closest ones, hoped in vain he could fight his way clear and escape, but there were too many of them. Gloved hands came from everywhere and held him fast. His suit jacket was ripped from his back and his suspenders snapped painfully many times. Two Mimes wearing cowboy hats approached twirling imaginary lassos. Jack could scarcely believe it when they took aim and seemed to throw them at him, but his mind simply refused to admit that although he could see nothing, he could feel the weight and strength of the ropes which bound him about the shoulders and waist.

Jack was dragged toward a wooded spot in the park, one that seemed darker than the rest. No markers adorned the area, no statues nor water fountains. It was a place most people left alone.

The Mime in front, the one who met Jack at his front

door, gave an evil smile and gestured for Jack to be led over to an old rusted park bench. The Mime leapt behind it and gave it a tug. Much to Jack's surprise, the bench tilted backward, slab and bolt, revealing a flight of stairs down a long dark passage. Bound as he was, Jack could not resist being dragged down into the bowels of the world beneath the park. As he walked, gloved hands pinched his cheeks and swatted the back of his head.

This can't be happening, thought Jack. When...If he got out of this mess, he would make certain that this place was gutted with fire.

The Mimes led him down for what seemed to Jack to be forever. They'd walked long enough to be under the city's subway tunnels. If his fears were correct and they were going to kill him, his body would never be found. Jack began to cry.

A Mime noticed Jack's erratic breathing and looked back at him. Then, as it opened its mouth in a look of feigned surprise, it held a mirror before Jack. Where ever a tear fell on Jack's face, a black tear formed as though drawn on his face by an invisible artist. A Mime's tear.

The tunnel opened up and became lighter as the ghoulishly quiet procession came to an immense cavern lit by torches. Jack immediately recognized the room for what it was supposed to be: A courtroom.

Motley colors and strips of cloth lined the walls in tatters, giving the place the look of a ruined circus. Stretching the length of the cave were stone benches, twelve deep, that encircled him. Not one seat was empty as faces painted in white with hideous black lips smiled and stared down upon him with demonic bulging eyes.

A Mime wearing a badge and a police hat came and took Jack to the center of the great hall where stood a platform and rail. He was meant to stand trial for what he had done.

The bailiff gestured and every Mime stood reverently as the last entered the room. He sat atop a great pedestal behind a bench: A Judge. He wore a white powdered wig that curled over his shoulders and the black robes that Jack had come to know through his years. The only real discernible difference between this and the other Mimes was his face. While most of the Mimes' faces were white with black lines about the mouth and eyes, this one's face was a lesson in contrast, half his face in white, the other in black. The eyes and mouth were drawn with the appropriate colors with lines drawn to give the Judge a scowling countenance.

He sat and gestured, giving the other Mimes permission to sit. The Judge raised his empty hand, as if holding a gavel, and brought it down sharply. Jack flinched as though the sound of the invisible gavel echoed in his ears.

Two Mimes, one in red tights and the other in an ill-fitting suit, approached the bench and bowed deeply. The Judge nodded and the two went to either side of Jack. The one in red stepped forward and began to gesture wildly about. It was then that Jack realized what was going on. The two Mimes were lawyers. The one in the bad suit was his defense, the other satanic looking fellow, the prosecutor. Jack struggled against the non-existent bonds.

As the prosecutor wriggled about, Jack began to understand what he was trying to say. He watched in horror as the Mime thrust an accusing finger toward him, then motioned for his first witness. The broken Mime from the previous day was brought forth in a wheelchair. With broad, sweeping movements, the prosecutor questioned the witness. After a lengthy show of “walking along,” performed using only his hands he put his fingers to his mouth in a silent whistle. Two more Mimes ran to his side, one roughly the size of the witness, the other obviously made up to look like a grotesque caricature of Jack.

The two proceeded to perform the altercation in broad detail. Every strike, kick, and insult replicated, but amplified as though looked at through a warped mirror. In horror, Jack watched himself pound on the poor man with devilish glee. Then, when the charade was finished, the two Mimes got up, bowed deeply before the Judge, and went

back to their seats. The prosecutor spread his hands and arms wide, indicating that he would now rest his case.

The room around Jack was a cacophony of movement. Jack instinctively put his hands to his ears to block out what would have been a deluge of angry sentiments from those in audience.

The Judge gestured toward the defense. Slowly, the lawyer turned his head and fixed his gaze into Jack's pleading eyes. As though inspecting him, the Mime looked Jack all the way up and down. He turned back toward the Judge and shrugged.

Jack stood in disbelief as the lawyer turned and sauntered broadly over to the prosecutor and shook his hand. He wanted to object, to call for a mistrial, to scream bloody murder, but although his mouth formed the words, no sound would come out.

The harlequin Judge again raised his imaginary gavel and gave what would have been a viscous strike to the bench. He began a long gesticulated frenzy that Jack could not even guess at the meaning of until he began to hear a voice, a whisper, buzzing inside his head.

. . . Found guilty of the persecution of our kind, and are therefore sentenced to life as one of our kind. . .

Jack shook his head and stared, for though the Judge's lips did not move, the words were becoming plainer

to him. He was being sentenced.

. . . *Furthermore*, the voice continued, *you shall be kept in containment for the duration of your life, set symbol for all who would follow your example.* The voice faded, and, as if to punctuate the last remark, the judge drew a square with his fingers in the air then once again snapped the vaporous gavel to the bench. This time, Jack could have sworn he heard its report.

At once, all the Mimes in attendance leaped to their feet, congratulating each other in silence for their victory over such persecution. The two Mimes in cowboy hats reappeared at Jack's sides and, taking hold of the invisible ropes which bound him, dragged him back toward the tunnel, followed by a female Mime with a small satchel and two whose movements suggested they were carrying something heavy.

When light finally broke into the tunnel, Jack was hauled up to the great open area of Central Park where people most liked to spend their lunch hours and feed pigeons. There the Mimes tied the imaginary rope to a tree. Though Jack struggled to free himself, the phantom bonds held fast.

The female Mime then reached in her bag and produced a tin of whiteface and a cake of black greasepaint and began applying them to Jack's face. She carefully lined

his eyes and eyebrows, then smeared more of the black paint on her own lips. Taking the sides of his head in her hands, she kissed him forcefully, leaving her imprint on his lips and completing his Mime's mask. She covered her mouth with the tips of her fingers on one hand, as if to stifle a schoolgirl giggle, and skipped away into the park.

The other two Mimes lifted whatever it was they were supposed to be carrying high above their heads and stepped to either side of him before lowering their arms to the ground. Both then waved in broad comedic fashion, and walked away against an invisible wind. The cowboys both tipped their hats, coiled their invisible lariats, and walked away, swaggering side to side.

Unsure of what the Mimes had actually done to him, Jack took two steps and ran into an invisible wall. Slowly he began to realize that they had put him in a box. He'd seen Mimes try to get out of imaginary boxes hundreds of times, but now he knew. The boxes were real.

Jack fell to his knees sobbing. He was sorry he'd beaten up the Mime. He was sorry, in fact, that he'd ever even heard of Mimes.

"Mommy! Look at the funny clown!"

A young, golden-haired child's blue eyes looked up at him.

"That's not a clown, dear," replied a tired-looking

woman. "That's a Mime."

"What's the difference?" asked the child.

Exasperated, the mother replied "Oh, I don't know. Mimes don't talk, I guess."

Jack wanted to scream and beg them for help in getting out of this box, but no sound would come from his severed vocal chords. All he could do was bang helplessly against the sides of his small invisible prison.

"Aw. . .," said the boy. "I've seen this gettin'-out-of-the-box thing before." His interest lost, the boy took his mother's hand and walked away, pointing out whatever new wonder caught his eye as they walked.

Jack's eyes followed them down the path as he continued to try to smash his way through the walls. He watched them walk away and stopped pounding. He stared in disbelief as he saw dozens of Mimes, each dressed in the suits or uniforms of the casual passer-by, lined up along the pathways, each of them furtively trying to find a way out of prisons made of air.

*The story you just read holds a special place in my heart. Not because I believe it's perfect, but because it was my first published short story. Back in 2001, before I had any aspirations of becoming a professional writer, I enrolled in a workshop class because I needed a credit, and it was the only one that fit my schedule. I wrote my first story, a little tale about a man who woke in the middle of the night to find his whole family had been butchered, and turned it in. The next class period, no one wanted to sit next to me. The story **Mimes** was, believe it or not, only the second short story I'd ever tried to write. It was published in "The Rectangle," the publication of the English Honor Society, Sigma Tau Delta. That a literary journal took my little mime story astonished me, and thrilled me too. This was the story the put me on the path to be what I am today. A writer. I have to give thanks to Miles Wilson, the professor of that class, and to my classmates, whose cringes only encouraged me to continue.*

Scott A. Johnson
Texas, 2012

