



LegumeMan

~~Books~~

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LegumeMan Books



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About the author

I'm a forty-two year-old father of two who loves anything horror-related. To date, I've had over 200 publications, and recently finished editing an anthology book of Michigan-based authors named "Michigan Madmen". It is available on Lulu.com and Amazon. I've written four books of short stories and one book of novellas, and am currently finishing up my first novel, a zombie tale titled "To See as a God Sees". I'm also a guest author each year at Memphis Junior High School.



2 + 2 = 5

Rick McQuiston

Hugh Mahorn scribbled the equation on the chalkboard:

$$2 + 2 =$$

in big, bold, white numbers. He always made sure to write very large so his students in the rear of the classroom could see the chalkboard clearly. When he finished, he glanced over the problems to ensure that he hadn't missed any.

His age was beginning to affect and even hinder his ability to teach, but he had promised himself when he was in college that he would do it until his dying day. He loved teaching, he had all his life, and after twenty-seven years he was not about to let an occasional slipping of the mind affect his professional destiny. His father had encouraged him, at least when he was around, to set a goal and strive continually to meet it and when that goal was met, set another, even higher one and so on and so on.

But it had always seemed somewhat hypocritical that his father was never around when he needed him. He had always wondered if that fact was the reason he was so driven in the pursuit of his career. He never wanted any of the children in his classes to feel like they did not have someone in their life that would be there for them and that was a prom-

$$2+2=5$$

ise he would always keep both to himself and to his students.

Satisfied with the problems on the board, he whirled around to face his class. Thirty-one small expressions greeted him, each a reflection of its owner's personality. Samuel Toffer boasted perfect white teeth in his ever-present grin. Jessica Alleau's pigtails framed her pale face giving her a look of innocence unparalleled by any other student he had ever taught. Little Billy Burrett was the smartest dresser in the class, wearing pressed cream-colored slacks and a bright red dress shirt. He always seemed indifferent to Hugh's lessons as if he already knew the answers but simply did not wish to reveal them. But he was a bright student, never absent and always well behaved.

Virtually all of the children in his classes were good kids. There were some bad apples occasionally but they were few and far between and even they had some good qualities to them. He had learned over the course of his career to balance discipline and leniency and the results usually, if not always, were generally positive.

"Mr. Fischer, would you please address the problems on the board?" More often than not he did not like to put the students on the spot but Timothy Fischer was slipping lately on his homework and he did not want to have a conference with his parents. He had always considered that to be a last alternative. After all, that would look bad on him as well as the student.

"Yes sir," Timothy quickly replied.

" $5 - 2 = 3$, $7 + 6 = 13$, $4 + 8$ is...umm...12 ..."

Excellent, Hugh thought to himself as he took a seat behind his well organized desk.

" $9 - 6 = 3$, $7 - 2$ is ...5 ..."

Yes, very good. Perhaps little Timothy would improve after all.

"And $2 + 2 = 5$."

“Very good, now I want you to ..Excuse me? What was your answer for the last problem again?”

Timothy was about to sit back down but immediately stood back up.

“5,” he answered confidently.

“The last answer is incorrect. $2 + 2 = 4$, not 5.” Hugh abruptly stood up from his desk and began to stretch his aching fingers. The puzzled looks the students shot at him made him uneasy in his classroom for the first time in twenty-seven years.

Several small hands raised into the air almost instantly. Timothy spoke up first, his voice laced with sincerity.

“Mr. Mahorn, the last answer was right, $2 + 2 = 5$.” The other children all nodded in agreement.

“Mr. Fischer, I think I know proper mathematics.” Again looks of bewilderment filled the room. “Now if you would open your Science logs to section four.”

Agatha Veril, all forty pounds of her, suddenly blurted out, “Mr. Mahorn! Mr. Mahorn! See, he was right!”

Hugh looked up from the papers he was straightening. Agatha was rather excited, much like an explorer making a great discovery.

“Excuse me?”

“See, $2 + 2 = 5$!” She struggled to hold up the thick Math book with her tiny arms.

Hugh leaned forward and examined the page she was pointing to. His eyes nearly fell out of his head when he saw the equation of $2 + 2 =$ and under it, upside down at the bottom of the page was the number 5.

“What’s the meaning of this?” he exclaimed to the startled children. He snatched the book from little Agatha who was now somewhat frightened of her teacher. A closer examination only verified what he feared... $2 + 2 = 5$.

His teacher's edition yielded the same results, as did three other students' books.

He had to remain calm. A typo? Possibly, but in all the books? And why did the students think it was correct?

"Ms. Lucido, may I see you for a moment please?"

The young history teacher from across the hallway smiled and excused herself from her class.

"Yes Mr. Mahorn?"

"Please, call me Hugh." Even though he was old enough to be her father he still secretly harbored a crush on the shapely, blonde woman.

"Hugh, what can I help you with?" Her soft smile sliced into his heart.

"This may sound odd...but could you answer a simple question for me?" He hoped he wouldn't sound too stupid. "What is 2 + 2?"

She looked at him like he was an alien from another world.

"Pardon me?" Her baby blue eyes expanded.

"I know, I know, but please just humor me."

"Well...2 + 2 = 5."

If the look on her face weren't dead serious, he would have broken out laughing. He watched as she walked back into her classroom and continued with her lessons. Stumbling back to his own room he heard something that sounded even stranger than the math equation...Ms. Lucido's well educated and attractive voice telling her student's historical dates.

"That's correct Michael, 1493, Christopher Columbi."

And another.

"JFK, 1964...correct. Who can tell me by whom? Nathan. Very good. Lee Harvey Oswath."

And yet another.

"The Revolutionary War was against whom? Sarah. Yes, that's correct. China, and when did it take place? Yes, 1795 thru 1802. Very good."

Hugh felt his head grow light.

“There must be some kind of mistake,” he muttered to the floor. “There has to be some logical explanation.”

He walked back to his classroom and fell into his chair. The students were staring at him, some in fear and others in pity but all in confusion as to why their teacher was behaving so strangely. Was this reality? 1493? Lee Harvey Oswath? China for heaven’s sake! He took a deep breath and straightened his tie. He had to maintain his composure. Agatha Veril was the first to speak up.

“Mr. Mahorn, are you feeling okay?”

A simple and sincere question, which would have received a simple and sincere answer, had the voice that asked it sounded like Agatha’s normal voice instead of a deep, raspy voice that was unmistakably full of hatred and evil.

“Mr. Mahorn? I said...are...you...feeling...okay!”

Her face remained unchanged. The same smooth auburn hair framing the small freckled face and baby blue eyes were still there. But the voice, it belonged to

a serial killer or a lunatic locked away in an insane asylum, not to the little girl who had told him only a few weeks earlier about the new kitten she had received for her birthday.

The other children stared at him, oblivious to their classmate’s anomaly. Of course, more than half of them were sporting their own abnormalities. Such as Blake Trenswell’s elongated face which bared oversized, serrated teeth or little Samantha Witt’s arms that were flailing so high above her pigtails that pieces of ceiling tile were crashing down onto her desk which was pulsating and glowing a deep shade of red and something close to a light blue.

“Mr. Mahorn?” It was Billy Barnett, the blood that was literally pouring from his nose and ears meshing perfectly with his red t-shirt. “Are we still going to have a test tomorrow?” His face had grown chalk

white due from loss of blood which had pooled into a huge crimson puddle at his feet.

Hugh swallowed hard. "Ummm...we...ahhh...I mean, I don't think..."

He shakily rose to his feet, knocking over his desk organizer and a large stack of ungraded papers. They crashed to the floor and promptly grew various legs and appendages resembling heads before rapidly scurrying away in all directions like deformed spiders.

"I..I have to go now," Hugh stuttered.

He actually feared the children now. His own class! "I'm not feeling well." He grabbed his coat and threw it over his shoulder before realizing that it no longer resembled his coat. It now looked like some type of octopod thing, which writhed in his hands. It made a loud thud as it slopped to the floor. As he stepped over it, it snapped at him with several glistening mouths.

The doorway loomed before him, the same doorway that he had passed through countless times before but from which now he was extremely uneasy to walk through. It stood before him, inviting him to attempt to go through it. He weighed his few options and decided that barreling through the doorway was preferable to facing the children in the classroom. Taking a deep breath and gritting his teeth he ran through the doorway as fast as he could.

The teeth slightly grazed his arms and shoulders, tearing some clothing away along with some skin. He had to force himself not to look back and see what he had narrowly escaped through.

He knew he had to rely on his survival instincts if he was going to make it out of the building. He had always been good under pressure. He had an ability to fully access the situation and seek out rational and secure options; however this was by no means a rational situation and he knew very well that his safety was by no means secure.

The hallway looked normal enough, to his great relief, and he started to sprint down it. He was careful not to look into other classrooms. His ears hurt from the various inhuman noises emanating from the rooms and he did not want to afflict that type of torture on his eyes.

The hallway seemed a mile long. Fluorescent light fixtures swayed back and forth, casting an angry reddish glow over the walls, which were noisily moving inwards towards each other. Within seconds, he was able to touch the walls on either side of him as he hurried down the hall. He had to make it to the main hall in the center of the school. Once there, he would be able to see what the extent of the 'infection' was and plan out his options for escape.

The walls clamped shut tightly behind him just as he reached the end of the hallway. There now remained nothing but a thin seam where the hallway had been only seconds before. He tried not to think about what had happened to the children and their teachers back in the classrooms.

He had to get a grip on himself. Twenty-seven years of educating had planted a certain amount of wisdom and common sense in him, but he knew that it would be at odds with what was happening all around him. This type of stuff just didn't happen. He closed his eyes and took several deep breaths all the while being constantly aware of his surroundings.

"Hugh!"

It was Mr. Watherton, the school janitor.

"Did I or did I not warn everyone about this?" His eyes blazed and his normally greased back hair stood straight up giving him the appearance of an animated lunatic.

"It's finally happening...just like I said it would. See, I told you, I told you what would happen. See."

Hugh took a cautious step towards him.

"What do you mean?" he asked while looking around carefully.

Watherton's wiry arms flung high into the air.

"What the hell have I been saying all along?" he screamed "'Bout reality and unreality. 'Bout sanity and insanity. 'Bout good and evil, black and white, light and darkness...up and down...in and out." His usually pale face now resembled a ripe tomato.

Hugh did his best to compose himself.

"Do you mean all those crazy things you've been talking about over the years?"

"Did ya think I was just nuts or something?"

Hugh bit his lip. "Well..."

Watherton let out a high-pitched laugh.

"Look around you Mahorn, do ya still think I'm crazy?"

Hugh felt a migraine coming on. Now was definitely not a good time for a headache, although that would be the least of his worries.

His attentions were distracted by a sharp, stinging on his left ankle. Looking down he saw a new dimension of insanity...a small blob of pitch blackness, which was squirming near his foot. Occasionally it sent out a pitch black tendril to jab his ankle. The incredible cold associated with it was beyond description. He kicked it away and it spun backwards before splattering against a far wall.

"It's gonna get a lot worse too," Mr. Watherton added in a distinct 'I told you so' tone. "Just wait and see." And with that he turned and started to stroll down the hall.

"It's like the sun," he bellowed to the ceiling "Sanity and insanity are kept in balance...just like the sun with its gravity. Eventually one will win out and overtake the other. Too bad it's the wrong one. Too bad it's the one we don't want. Too bad...too bad..."

Hugh watched him walk slowly away as he sprouted thick gray fur from head to toe. His head elongated to the point where it flopped to the floor, and when it did so, it burst open with incredible

force, spewing forth thousands of slime covered worms that quickly covered the polished tiles.

Hugh started to run when the worms began to crawl towards him rapidly, leaving sickly brown trails of slime behind them. What was once Mr. Watherton was now something that Hugh could not even begin to describe much less look at.

Turning around, he noticed that the front doors were starting to shrink. The same front doors that he walked through without a second thought countless times before. He would have to hurry if he wanted to make it through them. What he would do when he made it to the outside world, he didn't know. He didn't even know if this nightmare had reached the outside world yet, but he would deal with that when he had to. Right now, getting through the doors was first.

Mr. Watherton was now lumbering towards him, reaching out with huge, hairy appendages, reaching out eagerly, hungrily. Hugh did not want to imagine what it would be like to be caught in those things.

He literally flew across the floor, nearly tripping over a black thing that was rolling out of the main office. An unusual thought flitted across Hugh's mind... could that be Mr. Hadds, the Principal?

He made it through the doors just as they closed up. Hugh stood there, catching his breath and trying to think about what to do next. Call the Police? No, they'd never believe him. Get his camera to get some evidence? Wait! Why would he need to do that? Anyone could see what was happening. All they had to do was go to the school.

And then his thoughts were interrupted by heavy breathing directly behind him... low, inhuman breathing. He didn't look back, he just ran with all his strength to his car, which thankfully sat quietly where he had left it that morning.

The Pontiac rumbled to life and Hugh wasted little time in connecting the gas pedal to the floor. But

where was he to go? The Police. Even if they didn't believe him he had to still try, he had to try to warn them, he had to do his duty as a civilian.

Any thoughts of getting help from the Police were quickly dismissed when he drove up to the Police station. The entire three-story building was pulsating as if it was some type of creature eating a meal. As he rolled by the front doors the building stopped its chewing motion and locked a concrete, steel and glass stare directly on him. Hugh slammed the gas pedal to the floor. In his rear view mirror he saw three policemen stumble out of the front doors of the building and immediately be snatched back inside by a huge greenish tongue that shot out with lightning speed.

Hugh found himself having to reach deep inside to control his emotions. Fear, anger, confusion, they all vied for center stage in his mind. Fear of what would become of the world. Anger that god could have allowed something like this to happen. Confusion about how this could happen at all.

If only his father were here now. He could make up for years of absence with one appearance. His strong leadership would surely help Hugh find a rational and successful course to take. But that was only wishful thinking, for his father was long gone and hoping for guidance from above, whether it was from his father or god himself, was proving impossible to do in the face of such horrors. What mattered now was getting control of the situation and reaching his house. At least there he could gather his senses and figure what to do next.

The remainder of the drive home seemed somewhat normal. Most people were either unaware of any change in reality or were dealing with it in their own ways. He saw one man working on his car until the hood snapped shut on top of him, slicing him neatly into two pieces. Another man was walking his dog only to morph into some type of dog himself.

Hugh had to suppress a laugh when the dog changed into a human and began walking the man!

The Pontiac swung hard into the driveway leaving two black marks on the cracked concrete. Hugh jammed the car into park and switched the ignition off. He shakily got out of the car and shut the door...only there was no sound. Complete silence other than a few chirping birds overhead flying under pink clouds. But there was something strange about the clouds other than their unusual color; they seemed to sense the movement of the birds below them. Hugh watched in disbelief as they swiftly swooped down and engulfed the startled birds in one quick motion. Hugh didn't waste any time, he was through his front door inside of five seconds just as the clouds, now an angry deep red color, began to dive down in a deadly arc to grasp at the new, larger prey.

Inside the sanctuary of his house, Hugh raced to his bedroom where he kept his gun. He generally was against firearms but a burglar several years earlier left him with a scar on his leg and a new perspective on self-defense. He loaded the pistol and built a small mountain of furniture against the front door and windows.

Satisfied with the barricades, he settled into his worn but faithful couch, clutching the gun tightly and waiting for any sign of trouble.

Sleep eventually overtook him and despite what he had gone through he slid into a deep and peaceful slumber.

When he awoke some time later all was still. It had grown dark outside so he flipped on a small antique lamp that lay on the floor next to the couch. Still gripping the pistol tightly, he looked around the house. Shadows accented the walls but all seemed to be in order; except for the mess he had created barricading the house. He carefully cleared the front door and walked out onto his front

porch. Brilliant points of light filled the night sky. He couldn't remember being so happy to see a clear starry night. Crickets chirped their music and the light buzz from a nearby street light further put his mind at ease.

But he had to be careful. As he had learned, things weren't always what they seemed. He fetched his flashlight and scanned the surrounding area. Everything appeared normal. His Pontiac sat quietly in the driveway right where he had left it and he heard a dog bark from down the street. Eventually he felt secure enough to head back into the house. He needed a cup of tea, badly. He also needed to make a phone call. Anyone would do, just to make sure there were still humans in the world.

His Aunt Jenny sounded as she always did, shrill and energetic and Sorento Pizza was ready to take his order with no questions. He switched on some contemporary jazz music, kicked off his shoes and sipped some hot tea.

As his mind began its recovery back to normalcy he noticed something lying on his desk in the far corner of the room. There, amid various papers and pencils sat a small, silver finished calculator. Its buttons were worn by the many times he had used it to balance his checkbook or double check an equation. Slowly, cautiously, he walked over to the desk. He hit the clear button to activate it and steadied himself with several deep breaths.

Finally, he leaned forward and punched the buttons on the calculator.

2...+...2

He hesitated, thinking about how his mother attempted to fill the void when his father was not around for him. Strange thoughts to be thinking after what he had, apparently, been through but he couldn't help it. Sometimes his mind just drifted to important but misplaced thoughts.

Now all he had to do was hit the = button.

Another deep breath. He thought about how comical it was that a tiny button on a ten-dollar calculator held such power over him.

Then he pushed it ...=

He found his eyes had instinctively shut tight and he had to force himself to open them and look at the display on the calculator. A wide smile formed on his face

as the display clearly showed the number 4. He rubbed his eyes to make sure it wasn't a mistake. A 4 glared back at him.

He happily sighed relief and strolled back to his couch. He'd have to clean up the mess he'd made but that didn't bother him. All that mattered was that things were back to normal.

Perhaps it was just a dream or an hallucination. Or maybe it did happen but was cleared up now. Maybe god had simply been testing humanity's limits. Or perhaps the almighty had wanted to test the faith of just one man.

Hugh ran his fingers through his disheveled hair. He made a promise to himself to seek therapy but was nonetheless pleased at how he had handled the entire situation. He slowly straightened the room back up. Furniture

was put back into place and the floor was swept and soon it resembled his somewhat lonely but comfortable life.

When he was finished cleaning up he made himself a sandwich and walked into his bedroom. Behind him, on the desk, sat the ten-dollar, silver finished calculator with worn buttons. On its display, appeared the number 5.