

*The Town Drunk*

*Presents*

# **Gable and the Possible God**

*Mikal Trimm*

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The boy was the oldest boy in the world, even though he didn't know it. He did know that his dog was the ugliest dog in the world, but the boy was too considerate to tell him that; the dog, who had three legs, no tail, and terribly crooked teeth, considered himself quite handsome. The boy's name was Cable, and it was a very good name for him, which is as it should be, since he had picked it out himself. He was lean and hard and strong, and his hair was thick and silver. (When he'd gone about choosing his name, the dog had suggested Cottonwood, but the dog had a preoccupation with trees.)

Cable and the dog (whose name changed daily—today he was Mother's Favorite Dancer) had been walking for three days that morning. For anyone else, this might have posed an awful dilemma, but Cable and Mother's Favorite found no problem with it, neither of them having more than a passing acquaintance with the concept of time. Light dripped through the trees and gathered in puddles across their path. For a while they tried to dodge the sundrops that dribbled from above, but as the trees thinned out to make way for an approaching clearing, the sun began to pour, and they were soon drenched in light.

Mother's Favorite Dancer stopped in the middle of the path, shook himself, and squatted, off-balance, on his haunches. He turned his ugly but endearing face to Cable.

"I've been thinking," said Mother's Favorite.

"Cogitating?" inquired Cable.

"Quite. I've been thinking, and I've reached a decision."

"A verdict."

"More of a conclusion, actually."

"Ah."

"It is my opinion that, since we've been walking these four days, we—"

“Oh, has it been four days now?”

“Yes, it became four days about an hour ago, and by the way, my name is now Hero of Awesome Proportions.”

“Impressive!”

“Majestic, I’d go so far as to say. But I digress.”

“Nice choice of words.”

“Thank you.” Hero of Awesome Proportions sat silently, savoring the moment. Cable watched patiently for two or three respectful seconds, then interrupted his partner’s reverie.

“Ah-HEM.”

Hero jumped a bit and looked up. “Yes?”

“You were saying?”

“Was I? Oh, yes. Well, as I was saying, we’ve been walking these four days and, as someone has taken the trouble of placing a clearing in our way, it would seem a terrible waste not to take this opportunity to feast.”

“A feast! Well called, sir!”

“Well received, my fine fellow.”

“And what shall we feast on today?” Cable began to gather wild radishes and onions from the forest.

Hero of Awesome Proportions closed his eyes in anticipation. “I believe we shall start with stuffed goose livers...”

“In wine sauce or out?”

“Oh, in, I should think. Then we’ll proceed directly to the main course.”

“No salad?”

“I think not. Daring, I know, but sometimes one must take risks in the pursuit of gastronomic excellence.”

“Point taken.” Cable found a pomegranate bush and gathered up two plump specimens.

“Our main course will consist of braised duckling served with a lively mint sauce, accompanied

by *pommes-chiffon* and truffle tartlets.” As he spoke, Hero’s stomach growled in anticipation.

“Exquisite taste, if I may say so.”

“Please do. And for dessert, the *piece de resistance*...”

“Yes?”

“A large soup bone.”

“I’ll pass on dessert.”

“Oh, then may I have yours?”

“Certainly.”

Cable and Hero of Awesome Proportions repaired to the clearing, where they sat in a comfortable spot and began to feast, showering the chef with effusive praise and toasting each other generously.

It was during this regal repast that an old man appeared. It was possible that he’d wandered into the clearing from the woods while the companions were trying to think of another word for “talk.” (Cable had come up with “intercourse,” but they’d both decided that the possibilities of being misunderstood were far too appalling.) In any case, neither saw the old man until he was almost in their midst.

“Masticulate,” he said.

Cable and Hero looked up, surprised and more than a little impressed.

“Quick thinking, strange sir,” the dog offered. “May I ask who you are?”

“I *think* I’m a god,” the stranger replied.

Cable nodded gravely. He pointed at Hero of Awesome Proportions. “*He* thinks he’s handsome.”

The dog ignored this remark. “How did you arrive at that particular word so quickly?”

The old man looked confused. “I guess gods know these things.”

“Good point.” Cable gestured at the remaining food. “Would you like to join us at the feast? The duckling is especially well-prepared.”

The old man looked around. “I see only radishes and onions.”

Hero of Awesome Proportions snorted. “Well, you’re certainly not the god of imagination.”

“Yes. No poetic license whatsoever,” Cable concurred.

The possible god sat down abruptly. “Actually,” he explained mournfully, “I’m not sure *what* I’m the god of.”

Hero of Awesome Proportions padded over to the now-disconsolate old man. “Well, what is your name, then? Maybe that will give us some idea of your function.”

“I don’t remember.”

“You don’t remember your own name?”

The old man shrugged. “Bit of a poser, isn’t it?”

“Well, we can’t just call you ‘old fellow,’ can we?” interjected Cable.

“Why not? I can’t call either of you anything at all.”

“Why is that?”

The old man began to cry. “Because I don’t remember your names!”

Hero of Awesome Proportions patted the old boy on the knee with his only front paw, somehow managing not to fall over at the same time. “Here now, pull yourself together. We haven’t *told* you our names.”

“Yes, yes. You see,” Cable soothed, “you can’t actually *forget* something you’ve never known.” The old man seemed slightly mollified. “Anyway, I’m Cable, and this is my traveling companion, Hero of Awesome Proportions.”

The dog raised his ears. “But you may call me Hero.”

Cable brightened. “He may? May I?”

“Come, boy, let us not stumble headlong into chaos here.”

“Ah, you’re probably right. ‘Familiarity breeds contempt’.”

“Best not risk it, eh? Now,” Hero addressed their guest, “what makes you think you are a god?”

“Well...” The old man stood. “I can do this.” He spread his hands. His white robe flowed majestically from his arms.

“An impressive pose, I admit, but I hardly think—”

Hero's words were superseded by the grandfather of all thunderclaps. Lightning tore the sky into confetti. There was a rumbling of the firmament, and the heavens were rent asunder, and the earth was without form and void, and darkness moved over the face of the waters, and the rivers were as blood, and somewhere a choir was singing...

The old man lowered his arms, and all was still. Other than a few scorch marks on the ground and a couple of toppled trees, everything was back in order.

Cable and Hero were motionless for a moment. Then, realizing that the show was over, Cable burst into applause. "Oh, well done, well done indeed!"

"Yes, extremely godlike, I must say!" Hero concurred. "I especially liked the 'rending of the heavens' part."

The old man gave a slight bow to his audience. "Please, please. It was nothing, really."

Hero gave a snaggle-toothed grin. "Sir, you can be the god of three-legged dogs anytime!"

"Not much call for that line of work, is there?"

"Not really, no. But you'd have plenty of free time."

The god (for surely he must be one) considered this. "Free time, eh? All right, I accept. I am now the god of three-legged dogs!"

Cable piped in. "And silver-haired boys?"

Hero snuffled reproachfully. "Stumbling into chaos again, Cable?"

"Sorry."

The god stretched. "Now, what does the god of three-legged dogs do of an evening?"

Cable started. "Evening? Already? Of what day, Hero of Awesome Proportions?"

Hero pondered the question. "We've seen the birth of the world, my boy. I'd say that would take at least, oh, seven days. And by the way, my name is now Swifty the Wonder Dog."

The god raised an eyebrow. "You've changed names?"

"Certainly. I change names daily."

"But why?"

"With each day I grow and learn. The experiences of life change me. Since I am not the same dog I was yesterday, why should I be called by the same name?"

“That certainly *sounds* logical.” The god turned to Cable. “Then what shall I call *you* today?”

“Cable, of course.”

The divine head angled its gaze to the dog, perplexed.

“Cable never changes,” Swifty explained. “He’s actually quite unique in that respect.”

“The only thing left to establish,” Cable queried the god, “is what shall we call you?”

Swifty came up with the obvious solution. “Well,” he suggested, “‘Hero of Awesome Proportions’ seems to be available.”

The god acquiesced with what can only be described as divine grace.

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Cable, Swifty the Wonder Dog, and the newly-christened Hero of Awesome Proportions (the Second) were in a very noisy tavern located on the docks of a very busy city. Their choice of venue for the evening’s activities was greatly influenced by the fact that Swifty’s newly-found patron could produce gold coinage at will. As none of the three had any pressing engagements to attend to, and the god seemed more than willing to share the wealth, there seemed to be no reason not to enjoy a bit of quiet, companionable drunkenness. Hero II had kindly offered to transport the trio to “a little, out-of-the-way place” that he seemed to remember. No sooner had they agreed then they were swept up in a gust of wind and hurtled across the sky to a port city on the coast of some unidentified land. They set down outside of a tavern on the waterfront.

A man slouching by the doorway belched profoundly and gestured in their general direction. “Who does he think *he* is? A wizard?”

“No,” Cable replied promptly, “a god.”

Swifty squinted. “Somehow,” he mused, “I expected an inn frequented by a god to be more, well...”

“Regal?” offered Cable.

“Olympian?” submitted Hero II.

“*Clean* was more the term I was looking for.”

There was much to be said for this canine assessment. The hospice in question was the architectural equivalent of a boil; it rose from its foundation, an unnatural growth, leaking drunkards and brawlers in a sluggish flow.

The god shrugged. “What can I say? I, too, am disappointed.” He moved to enter. “It’s

mellowed quite a bit since I was last here.”

And now they sat at a corner table, drawing at their ales and drawing stares and comments from the other patrons.

“Who’s the old guy?” whispered one.

“Which one?” his confederate inquired.

Cable looked up suspiciously.

Suddenly, a loud voice burst in on the trio. “Hey!” A beaten, ugly, and intensely unwelcome face thrust itself after the voice. “I don’t think we allow dogs in this bar.” He smiled a cruel smile, exposing teeth that were, if anything, more crooked than Swifty’s. “Especially,” the thug continued, “*Ugly* dogs!” He reached forward, grabbing Swifty by the throat and, before Cable could say, “Um, sir—” lifted the dog above his head.

In a calm, though slightly choked voice, Swifty said, “If you don’t unhand me, sir, I shall be forced to give you a good gnawing.”

Barely had he spoken when a stein-shaking bellow rattled the room. **“YOU DARE?”**

The pooch-molester, now slightly deaf as well as ugly, turned to see the robed old man at the table rise, shaking in fury.

**“YOU DARE MANHANDLE A CREATURE UNDER MY PROTECTION?”**

“Well, it wasn’t so much manhandle as *doghandle*, actually...” Swifty’s attacker cringed, trying desperately to hide the dog behind his back.

**“THEN,”** the god rumbled, raising his arm, **“YOU DIE!”**

“Can’t we talk this o—”

Thunder and lightning outside can be a frightening experience; inside, it’s murder. When the air finally cleared and everyone had recovered from a sudden attack of blindness, all that remained of Swifty’s foe was a pile of ashes on the floor and the stump of the man’s hand, still gripping the dog’s neck. Swifty shook himself, and the offending article dropped off, trying ineffectively to scuttle away. It was quickly rendered down with a small afterburst from Hero II’s finger.

There was a profound silence as the dog made his dignified way back to his seat. Finally, conversation resumed.

“Notice the markings, Claude?”

“Beautiful. At first I thought it was mange, but now I see the error in my judgment.”

“Lovely pedigree.”

Swiftly looked around, nodding in approval. “That’s the way it is with these local types. You sometimes need to light a fire beneath them before they can appreciate true beauty.”

Hero II’s eyes were shining with holy passion. “My Self, that was good fun! Did you see how his hair stood up right before the end? And the way his eyes bulged out!”

Cable took a healthy swig from his mug. “Yes, well, you certainly showed him. Now we can resume our drinking in peace and—”

Hero II clamped his hand over Cable’s mouth. “*What* was that you said?”

“Mmph mm mmph...”

“Oh, sorry.” The god uncovered Cable’s mouth.

“That is, now that the interruptions are over, we can resume our quest for insobriety in peace—”

“*That* was the word!” The god rose suddenly, swelling in size and causing much incidental damage to furniture and unobservant drinkers. He shifted his gaze to include everyone in the room. “**WHAT HAPPENED TO THE WAR?**”

There was a natural hesitancy to speak amongst the clientele. The god caused a slight (in divine terms) rumbling to commence. Suddenly, tongues that had found themselves shackled in cave-mouths burst forth, wingéd, from their imprisonment.

“Well, it was rather silly—”

“...all the blood and limbs and such—”

“...bad food—”

“...cold nights—”

“What war?”

The god grew larger, threatening roof beams. “**WHO SAID THAT?**”

The man who had made the last comment found himself in the regrettable position of being at the receiving end of several loaded fingers. The largest of these digits went off with a resounding clap and a flash of light. The other fingers shrank back quickly, in shame, perhaps, at their owners’ impotence. The resulting pile of ash was beyond such recriminations.

At this point in the proceedings, Cable and Swiftly came to a mutual understanding as to the ways and paths of gods; that is, when a god has chosen his path, stay out of his way. Having reached

this heightened level of awareness, they took the opportunity to crouch behind a conveniently overturned table.

The god's wrath was increasing hellishly. **"YOUR WAR, YOU FOOLS! YOU'VE BEEN HAVING A CIVIL WAR FOR CENTURIES!"**

A voice escaped from its owner's unwary lips. "Why?"

Boom. Flash. Ash.

**"WHO CARES WHY? IT WAS A BLOODY GOOD WAR!"**

There was a spirited chorus of "Oh."

The god was amazed. "You mean you don't remember why you hate each other?"

A timid voice faltered its way through the crowd. "Um... Harry there borrowed my hammer from me and never returned it..."

"Well, that's a start."

Another brave soul joined in. "And Cyril there always talks real close to you, even though he has the worst breath in nine counties."

"Yes, yes..."

"And," a third man boomed out, "I just don't like that guy's face!"

**"WONDERFUL!"** praised the god.

More voices joined in the growing cacophony. There were audible *snikts* as knives were drawn from sheaths, and over all the *basso profundo* chuckle of a god enjoying his work. Over-anxious arguers were already beginning to raze small outbuildings.

**"COME ON! LET'S GET INTO SOME REALLY JUICY HATE, MEN!"**

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Cable and Swifty, having made their way quickly but cautiously through the city, sat on a nearby hill, watching the flames spread from street to street. Swifty stretched himself out, laying his head on his paw. He sighed contentedly.

"It's so nice to watch an artist at work," Cable observed.

Swifty rolled onto his back. "Yes, he truly has a grasp of the form. Such decisiveness, such unrestrained fury, the subtle use of blind prejudice and utter stupidity—all in all, a very fulfilling

apocalypse.”

“He *was* masterful,” agreed Cable, stretching. “Not like some gods of war we’ve met.”

The dog arose. “Yes, yes. Like Mars, say.”

“Puh-lease.”

“All that rhetoric about just causes and tragic heroism; it merely muddles the landscape.”

Cable stood, shaking his legs to restore circulation. Swifty shook himself once, chased the place where a tail should have been three times, and waited as the air before them shimmered and changed to reveal the path they had been walking earlier. Cable smiled in appreciation, scratching behind his right ear to bring the sky closer to twilight. “It’s been a long day.”

“Two and a half days, actually,” the dog corrected as they stepped into the scenery.

“Oh? And what is your name now?” Cable asked as they walked into the fading day.

“Well,” Divine Retribution began...

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**Mikal Trimm** has recent and forthcoming stories in *Polyphony 6*, *Interfictions*, *Black Gate*, *Postscripts*, and *Weird Tales*. He is the father of two pre-teen girls, but he still manages to fake a sense of humor.

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