

Roommates

By Chris Larsen

Dewey Watson is what most people would call a slacker. Those people would be wrong. Dewey isn't lazy. In fact, he's one of the most driven people you could hope to meet. He just can't find a job that can hold his interest. Fortunately for him, money is not an issue. His great-grandfather had been the assistant to a great detective, and had made a small fortune publishing accounts of his adventures. Over time (with the help of interest and royalties), the small fortune grew into a large one, and through the ingenuity and talent of the Watson family (Dewey's grandfather Randolph Watson moved to the United States and became a big-time band leader, while his father James runs a high-profile law firm), it grew from a large fortune into a massive one.

Me? I'm the opposite. I am what most people would call a hard worker. I've known that I wanted to be a lawyer since fourth grade, and since that time I've done everything I've needed to do to make that dream come true. I worked hard all throughout high school and college, earning accolades and scholarships along the way. Good thing, too, because for me, money has always been an issue. My family wasn't poor, but we weren't rich, either. My great-grandfather had been the assistant to a great... undertaker. No fortune to be made writing about *that* business. My grandfather was a farmer, and my mother and father run a small but successful restaurant in the small town where I grew up.

When I graduated from Columbia Law, I decided to stay in the city. I had always loved New York—the bright lights of Times Square at night, pedestrians swarming across the street trying to beat the blinking red hand that signaled them to stop, parents

trying to avert their children's eyes from the "movie stores" on 8th Avenue—there's no other place in the world like it. In spite of my small town upbringing, I felt more at home in the hustle and bustle of the big city, so I spent the better part of my final semester obsessively refreshing Craigslist in the hopes that I could find an apartment in the more exciting part of Manhattan.

At least twice a week I would visit different apartments in the hopes of finding one that fit my needs, meaning an inexpensive apartment that was actually habitable (thanks, student loans!). I failed to take into account that this was New York, where even the souvenir salt shakers were out of my price range. I distinctly remember the cheapest apartment I visited—when the elderly landlady opened the door, an army of roaches scattered to hide. Unfortunately for them, the rats had taken all of the good hiding places. I walked through the door with some trepidation—I had never gotten on well with vermin (keep the lawyer jokes to yourself, please). With every step I took in that cramped apartment, I shuddered, imagining tiny feelers brushing against my skin.

I surveyed the apartment. It was furnished, but I didn't see the "high quality furniture" that the posting had mentioned. Instead, I saw a stained tablecloth covering a rickety card table. A bowl of plastic fruit sat on the table to add a touch of class. The table was surrounded by four folding chairs. Bits of foam hung from tears in the vinyl backing of the chairs.

"There's your breakfast nook," Mrs. Richardson, the landlady, said with a kind smile. She pointed to a ragged old couch covered in what I hoped were coffee stains. "And over there you can watch the television." The TV had a screen roughly the size of a loaf of bread, and was topped with a set of rabbit ears that would have made Bugs Bunny jealous. I walked over to the TV, dodging rodents and insects along the way. I

turned the dial. A loud buzzing sound filled the room as the TV warmed up. A few seconds later, a very fuzzy black and white image filled the screen. Near as I could tell, it was either Al Roker or Fozzie Bear.

“Oh, my favorite program!” Mrs. Richardson squealed. She hurried over to the couch as fast as her little arthritic legs would take her and sat down to watch. The TV made a fuzzy coughing sound. The old lady laughed and clapped her hands. “Oh, isn’t this a wonderful program? I just love it when Tony does his tough guy act! He’s just a big softie, though...”

I had no idea what she was talking about, so I quickly changed the subject. “So about this apartment...” I began.

“Oh, isn’t it lovely!” she exclaimed. “I just can’t imagine why I can’t rent it out... And at such a reasonable price! Oh, ever since that incident...”

“What incident?” I interrupted.

“Oh, you’re probably too young to remember it,” she said smiling.

That sealed it. This was not the apartment for me.

Not that I could afford it anyway.

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As graduation approached, it seemed as though my fate were sealed. As much as I hated the thought, I’d have to leave the city. That is, until I saw the ad that changed everything:

WANTED:

Roommate for a 24-year-old dude. Fully furnished apartment. No bugs, no rent, no problem! Call Dewey Watson.

I couldn't believe it. It was too good to be true. It had to be some kind of scam. It couldn't possibly be as good as it sounded. I had no choice.

I had to check it out.

You're a lawyer, Nick, I told myself. No one can pull any scam on you. You'll see right through it. You'll take them to court. You'll win! Maybe they'll settle and give you the apartment!

I called the number listed in the ad. It rang a few times before being answered.

“Hey, hey! Dewey Watson here! What can I do for you?”

One thing you have to understand about Dewey is that his voice embodies his personality. I've never met a more laid back and easygoing person than Dewey, and all of that came through his voice. He speaks with the laid back attitude and cadence of a surfer (which is ironic, considering that surfing is one of the few activities he hasn't tried yet) and the innocence of a child, all filtered through a keen intelligence. I remember thinking that it sounded like a voice I could trust.

“Hi, my name is Nick Campbell,” I said. “I'm calling about your Craigslist ad.”

“All right!” came the voice, sounding genuinely excited. “You need to come check this place out, man! I think you'll love it!”

He sounds nice enough, I thought to myself. But I have to keep my guard up... If this is a trick, I'm not going to fall for it.

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The next day I made my way to Dewey's apartment uptown. As I stepped onto the elevator in the lobby, a man in a uniform looked at me and asked, “Which floor, sir?” His voice had a refined air to it.

“Twenty-second, please,” I answered. I shifted uncomfortably. I had never been to such a swanky building before. Even in my light blue shirt and tie I felt underdressed.

I’ve always been uncomfortable in elevators. Not scared, just uncomfortable. It’s not the elevator itself that gets me; it’s the awkward silence that comes from sharing a very small space with strangers. I glanced at the elevator operator.

“So,” I said nervously, bouncing up and down on my toes as I leaned uncomfortably into the corner of the elevator. “Elevators.” He looked at me with a quizzical expression on his face. “What made you want to go into elevators?”

“Usually the desire to move up or down,” the man replied with a hint of annoyance. I decided not to say anything else for the rest of the ride, instead focusing on the music emanating softly from the speakers. It was a slowed-down instrumental version of “The Boxer,” a saxophone replacing the lead vocals.

As I stood in the corner wondering how it was possible that one of my favorite instruments could be so misused, I heard the elevator operator’s voice. “Twenty-second floor.”

I muttered my thanks as I stepped off of the elevator, wondering if I should have tipped him. *Note to self: if you move in, take the stairs.*

“You Nick Campbell?”

I looked up. Standing there, in sharp contrast with the ornate decorations lining the hallway, was a man. He was wearing a baseball cap on top of his medium length brown hair. An open long-sleeved blue shirt hung loosely over his white t-shirt. He had on a slightly baggy pair of blue jeans. He was not at all the type of person I expected to see in such a posh building. Was this really the man I came to see?

“Hi, that’s me,” I said, extending my hand. “You must be Dewey Watson?”

“You know it!” he exclaimed, slapping my hand in greeting. “How’s it goin’, dude?”

I was thoroughly confused. This entire building exuded an air of pretension and wealth, but standing before me was a man who, quite honestly, looked like he belonged in a frat house.

“So you wanna see the apartment, dude?” he asked eagerly.

“Uh... sure,” came my entirely unsure reply.

Dewey led me down the hall, stopping at the last door, marked 2218.

“Here we are, man!” Dewey said smiling. “Prepare to be amazed.”

Dewey opened the door, and I think I probably gasped. It was the largest, best furnished apartment I had ever seen. The view was breathtaking—the window overlooked Central Park. The furniture looked comfortable and stylish, the TV was huge, and everything was so *clean!* It was the complete opposite of every other apartment I had looked at.

“You like it?” asked Dewey. I could tell from his voice that he already knew the answer.

“It’s... it’s...” I sputtered.

“It’s pretty nice,” Dewey laughed.

“Nice?” I interjected in disbelief. “It’s fantastic! I’ve never seen anything like this before!”

“So you wanna live here, man?” Dewey asked. That’s when I remembered: I had to be on the lookout for a catch.

“How much is it?” I asked warily.

“Don’t worry about money, man,” Dewey said. “I own this place. We’ll split the utilities and stuff to make it fair, but rent? No worries, man.”

It took me a few minutes to digest everything that Dewey had said. No rent? He *owned* the apartment? I sat down to gather my thoughts.

“How?” I asked. That’s when Dewey explained to me about his family’s fortune. I still couldn’t believe it.

“But you own this apartment?” I inquired. “Did your father buy it for you?”

“No, man!” Dewey replied, sounding slightly offended. “That’s not the Watson way! I make my own money honestly.”

“But you’re only twenty-four!” I exclaimed. “How could you possibly have enough money to own a place like this?”

Dewey just smiled. “Oh, odd jobs here and there. Never underestimate the power of a good education, my friend. So,” he continued. “Reached a decision yet?”

I hesitated. “Well...” Why not? “Sure, I’ll give it a shot.”

“Awesome, man!” said Dewey. “Just let me know when you’re ready to move in, and I’ll be ready.”

I seriously hoped I wouldn’t regret this.

* * * *

A month later I was all moved in. Of course, I had to deal with the growing pains that always come from getting a new roommate. For example, Dewey sang in the shower. More specifically, he sang Italian opera in the shower. Loudly. I was very surprised the first time I heard it, because from the beginning, I never pegged Dewey as an opera fan.

I was also surprised because it was four in the morning.

We worked through that and other problems, though, and over the course of the next few weeks we became fast friends. Dewey had lived a fascinating life. He was multilingual—I had never even heard of some of the languages he knew. As he explained it, he had discovered at a young age that he had a knack for learning new things—math, science, history, language, it all came naturally to him. His mother told him that this was a gift he should never waste. He took that to heart and read everything that he could get his hands on. He became a sort of Renaissance man.

I later found out that his greatest asset was also his biggest flaw. Dewey was prone to obsession. Nothing out of the ordinary or threatening, but when Dewey became interested in a new subject, he threw his entire heart and soul—and wallet—into pursuing his interest.

He also threw his roommate into it.

I had been working at a law firm in SoHo for about a month when Dewey said to me, “We should go camping.”

“Camping?” I asked. I’m not a very outdoorsy person, so I wasn’t sure what I thought of the idea.

“Yeah!” he said, his voice rising in excitement. “C’mon, Nick, just take a week off from work and let’s go!”

“A week?” I said, incredulous.

“Yeah! Get back to nature! It’ll be fun!”

I told him that I’d see what I could do, but that I doubted that I could get the time off.

Turns out I was wrong.

When Dewey found out that I was given a week's break, he switched into his ultra-driven mode. "Time to get packing."

Early the next Saturday morning, we left the apartment with our gear. Actually, all I had was my sleeping bag. Dewey told me that he would take care of the rest. Like I said before, he's a person you instinctively trust.

Dewey hailed a cab, and as it pulled up, he leaned into the window and said something to the driver that sounded completely unintelligible to me.

"Urdu," he explained as he sat down next to me. "Did you know that that's the language spoken by most cab drivers in New York?"

The cab ride was quiet—I was silent in anxiety, while Dewey was too excited to talk. Before too long, though, the driver stopped. I was confused.

"Dewey, why are we at La Guardia?" I asked.

"Well, how else are we supposed to get to Washington?" he shrugged.

"Washington?" I yelled in disbelief.

"The Evergreen State," Dewey said smiling. "Isn't this exciting?"

I wasn't so sure.

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On the Watson family plane(!), I demanded an explanation.

"What is going on?" I asked harshly.

"Well, how are we going to find the Sasquatch if we don't go to Washington?" Dewey said, sounding annoyed.

I couldn't believe my ears. "Sasquatch?"

"Bigfoot!" Dewey said, getting excited. "We're going to go out and get the definitive proof of its existence." He began rattling off facts and figures, names of

prominent Bigfoot researchers, and theories involving extinct apes and Native American legends. He even took me frame-by-frame through that famous film footage that supposedly shows Bigfoot walking by a creek.

“You see?” he concluded. “There’s an ape out there that needs discovering, and we’re going to be the ones to do it.”

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Three days into our expedition, I couldn’t take it anymore. I had more mosquito bites than I could count. Every night I woke up to the sounds of Dewey fiddling around with his night vision camera. I was tired, in pain, and cranky. And smelly (“We have to camouflage our scents or the Sasquatch won’t come near,” Dewey had explained while rubbing mud and dirt into his hair).

That day, while Dewey was out on patrol, I resolved to tell him over dinner (canned beans... again) that I wanted to go home. But as the sun began to set, he hadn’t returned. I reached for my phone and quickly called him. From his tent, I heard the opening notes of “Weird Al” Yankovic’s *Hamilton* polka medley. Great, he’d left his phone. What was I going to do? It was getting darker by the second.

“Dewey, are you there?” I yelled. No answer. *C’mon, answer me Dewey!* “Dewey? DEWEY!”

I heard rustling in the bushes, then the sound of twigs snapping. Someone was coming. I don’t know why, but I suddenly felt very nervous. As stealthily as I could, I snuck behind a tree. I peeked around and saw something walk by. From the light of the campfire, I could see that it was tall—probably around eight feet. It was walking on two legs and covered in brown fur. *It couldn’t be*, I thought. I whipped out my phone as quietly as I could and snapped a picture. The next thing I knew, I heard a crashing

sound, and then the sound of the creature—whatever it was—running away. I waited for a few minutes. Satisfied that the creature was gone, I slowly crept out from behind the tree and surveyed the camp. Everything was intact, with one exception: whatever that creature was, it had knocked over the night vision camera and apparently stepped on it, for it now sat on the ground in a thousand pieces.

“Dude, what happened?”

“DEWEY!”

I turned around and saw Dewey running towards me.

“Where were you?” I said, relieved and frightened at the same time.

“Me? Oh, I was down by the river,” he answered. “You were right, man. I couldn’t stand it anymore—I needed a bath.”

I just stared at him.

“What?” he asked. His eyes found the pieces of the camera on the ground. “Dude, what did this?”

“I’m sorry,” I apologized. “Something came by... I don’t know what it was, and I hid, and when I came out, this had been broken.” I was babbling like a child who’d accidentally dropped his mother’s favorite snow globe.

“Dude, it’s alright,” Dewey said. “You OK?”

“Yeah, I am, thanks,” I replied. I looked at what was once the camera. “Any chance anything can be salvaged?”

Dewey began digging through the camera pieces. He sighed. “Looks like the memory card got smashed, and I didn’t have it set to backup remotely or anything... We’ll never know what knocked it over.”

That reminded me! “Actually,” I said, taking out my phone, “I did manage to snap a picture.”

“What? Let me see, dude!” Dewey rushed to my side and peered intently at the screen. “Whoa... Dude...”

I looked down. I didn’t see what was so exciting. All I could see was a large, blurry, brown thing on the edge of the frame. It could have been a bear for all I knew. That’s not what Dewey thought.

“You got it, man!” he shouted. “Sasquatch! Bigfoot! It’s right there!”

I decided that it was best not to disagree.

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We spent a few more days in Washington, but nothing like that night happened again (which was fine with me—I’d had enough excitement to last me a few months). Dewey slept most of the way back. *This wasn’t so bad*, I thought to myself.

Dewey began to stir. “Thanks for coming, man,” he said.

“No problem,” I said. “I had fun.” This surprised me. I had been sure that it would be an awful week, but looking back, I had actually enjoyed it.

“You know,” he said. “You’re the first roommate who’s actually gone along with one of my ideas.” I didn’t find that hard to believe, but I decided not to tell him that. “Usually I’ll come up with an idea and they’ll tell me how ridiculous it is, or that I’m just wasting time and I should go get a real job.”

“Well, are you happy?” I asked him.

He stopped and thought. “I’m happy when I can do something that I feel is important to me. I might not be a lawyer like you or my dad, and I’m not a doctor or anything ‘important’ like that, but I’m happy.”

“You just have a natural curiosity,” I said. “And you’re happiest when you’re satisfying that curiosity. There’s nothing wrong with that. Heck, someday you might make a groundbreaking discovery through that.”

Dewey smiled. “You may be right,” he said. “Thanks.”

And with that, he went back to sleep.

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A few weeks later, I was working on some paperwork that I had brought home from the firm when Dewey rushed in.

“Hey, Nick!” he said, practically shouting. “Want to go fishing?”

The next thing I knew, we were on a plane to Scotland for a little fishing trip on Loch Ness.

Curiosity. It’s a beautiful thing, isn’t it?