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BLURBLE

By M. G. ZIMMERMAN

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

Great oaks from little acorns grow. But who knows what is likely to sprout from an alien seed merchandised by a hot-shot adman?

JOE WEIDERMEYER'S car shot past the billboard. "Blurble?"

"Now what the hell is Blurble?" wondered Joe as he eased up on the accelerator. Advertising interested him; he was a vice-president, one of twenty-four in the firm of MILKBERRY, MOTZART, & MILTONE. His position was precarious, as are all vice-presidents in advertising firms, and in the past thirteen weeks, Joe, having been elevated to this new and high position, lived, loved, and liked anything, everything, or anyone who was distantly related to advertising in any form, shape, or manner, whatsoever.

So Joe signalled a u-turn and headed back the way he

had just come. Executing another u-turn brought him face to face with the almost empty billboard.

Blurble, it radiated in multi-colored, knee-high letters. Nothing else, just—**Blurble**.

"I knew it," sighed Joe, fatalistically.

He was thinking of Hank Singer, also a vice-president and the most dangerous rival for not only the chief executive spot but for Molly as well, a thorn on both counts.

"Score one for Hanky boy," he said to himself. This gimmick was a honey. How Hank had clevered it out was beyond Joe's comprehensible powers. It was a lulu; Joe had to admit that, but not without painful twinges of jealousy assailing

the most vulnerable part of his make-up, his ego.

Visions of Hank jubilantly being called into the Big Man's Domain, patted on the back, and becoming V. P. number 1 filled Joe's mind.

"Ugh," he shuddered, reverting to primeval speech. He studied the billboard once more, going over it with a practiced eye, searching for defects, any defects. There were none.

"Maybe I've been spending too much time with Molly," decided Joe. "But now is the time for action."

With wheels of determination clicking around inside his brain, Joe started the car and drove at a mad pace toward the office. He was thinking up a gimmick to surpass this coup d'état that Hank had so skillfully weaved. But his brain wasn't functioning properly and his mind was pathetically blank when he reached the office door.

"Well," he reasoned philosophically, "I'll just have to brazen it out." He shrugged, donned his most smug look of supercilious contempt, usually reserved for special occasions and subordinates, and shouldered his way inside.

"Good morning all."

Joe bowed low, hiding his



face from all present. On his way down he noticed the glum look spread across Hank's countenance. Joe stopped before his sacroiliac locked on him, last resort to emerge from a ticklish situation without losing face.

He straightened up again with some difficulty. Joe tucked away a mental note to partake of more outdoor exercises.

He loosed his most dazzling smile in the direction of his arch-rival, and with a cheery flick of his well-groomed above-shoulders, shot him a happy hello and my aren't you down to the slave-shop early?

Joe wasn't positive, but the reply that faintly reached his ears resembled a term he had never heard from human lips other than his own.

"Dib you say—Blurble?" asked Joe.

Hank stood up. The grin on his face was certainly a sick one. He nodded unhappily.

"That's what I said. Blurble."

Hank sat down again. Joe wondered how he had stood up in the first place. Hank looked sick.

"Hey! What's wrong with you? Why aren't you leering at me the way you always do when you've done something sneaky and stinky behind my

back?" demanded Joe, slightly perturbed by Hank's strange behavior.

Hank threw him a weak, defiant glance that was meant to explain it all. It didn't, and Joe stood there, straight and tall, kingly, as if patiently waiting for a frightened serf to explain why he had resisted the King's Guard while they burned his barn for sport.

"Haven't you got it backwards?" Hank finally spoke up. "Blurble is *your* something sneaky and stinky behind *my* back, isn't it?" demanded Hank, slightly perturbed by Joe's strange behavior.

"You mean—, Blurble isn't yours?" stammered Joe, at a loss for words.

"No," replied Hank. "I thought it was yours!"

Sadly, Joe shook his head. "Nein."

Sadly, Hank shook his head. "Nein."

He managed another of his sickly grins. "Well, looks like a dark horse. What V. P. did we underestimate, I wonder?"

Joe's hands shot over his head, palms-upward. "Who knows? Who wants to know?"

Once again visions of some enterprising, bright young man in the Big Boy's Domain, patted on the back, smoking B.B.'s Havana-tampas, floated

around in Joe's mind; only this time the veep's face was blank.

"Hank," he started.

"Yes, I know. We're thinking the same thing." He lapsed into moody silence.

"Well, B.B. won't be in for some time yet. That leaves us time enough to get a good start. Shall we remove our carcasses from here and drop them at the nearest pickling factory?" Hank threw a brotherly arm around Joe's shoulder.

Surprisingly, Joe found he didn't mind. Maybe Hank wasn't such a heel after all. He threw a brotherly arm around Hank's shoulder and refrained from shedding a comradely tear.

"Let's," he sniffled.

A few good, stiff shots were in order. The Big Man would be speaking to them shortly.

Joe paused at the door long enough to turn and announce dramatically, "*Ars longa, vita brevis!*" With this, he turned on his heels and quickly strode after Hank, visions of whiskey sours spurring him on to better than average speed. He caught up with Hank and once again they threw their arms around each other's shoulders.

In the hallway they met Molly Breenan. Both Hank and Joe had decided against

her last name; Breenan was to be banished, replaced by either Singer or Weidermeyer. Molly Singer. Molly Weidermeyer. which sounded more chic, sophisticated? Unhappily, Joe had had to concede to Hank on that point. Molly Singer did have a nice ring to it.

With arms still locked around shoulders in an attitude of brotherly love, both men bowed as low as circumstances permitted.

Molly looked on, mollified. Never had she seen these two men in such a state of friendliness. Their rivalry had spread beyond the portals of MILKBERRY, MOTZART, & MILTONE to other firms, and their battle for position and Molly was fast becoming legend in the advertising world.

"What's happened?" Molly feared the worst.

"Ah," sighed Joe dramatically. "Hank is a good fellow. He had offered alcoholic contentment to this unworthy peon," Joe pointed a long finger at himself, "who accepts with humble gratitude. If not stretching the invitation, would you care to partake of imbibement for a short, but captivating moment before B.B. makes a tour of his little Domain?"

"What's he ulcerizing now? I thought that after today one

of you two would be First V.P. What's happened?"

Hank pursed his lips. "We have failed. Some young vice-president, callously, ambitiously, cut our throats. No doubt you have observed certain billboards today?"

"You mean to say that Blurble isn't yours? But I thought—I mean, that is . . ." Molly gave up and let her voice trail off into silence.

"Correct," chimed in Joe. "Blurble is not our idea, combined or separately. We have been ousted."

A slight silence followed while all three envisioned the events that were sure to follow. B.B. would order a carton of tranquilizers, the V.P. scene would shift turbulently, men would be hired, personnel would be fired. All positions would be unstable.

Molly squirmed in between the two men and led them back toward the office. "You're going to need all your faculties this morning, and not hampered by alcoholic hiccups. Come on."

The two men nodded unhappily. She was right. Molly was always right. They allowed her to drag them reluctantly into the inner domains of the Big Boy's little dictatorship.

"Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate," quoted Joe, won-

dering if Dante had been correct, as the door closed behind him.

"Oh, do be quiet," commanded Molly, exasperated. "You've troubles enough as is. Why can't you be more like Hank?"

Hank stood silently, head bowed; the perfect picture of a little child expecting a slight punishment from an understanding parent for a little breach of justice.

Joe felt disgust well up inside him. Hank had his way of approaching the Big Man, Joe had his highways of progression, and never the two shall cross, he promised himself.

His later New Year's resolution was interrupted by a silky smooth voice from the intercom system.

"Joe, Hank, would you please drop into my office when you find time?"

Joe knew that question was the same as an order. He and Hank had time to see the Boss, even if they were buried under a stack of work that had been classified as urgent.

"Good luck and best wishes for a speedy recovery," whispered Molly as the two men made their way across the floor to the door leading into the inner sanctum.

Inside Joe found himself

ushered into a soft, plush chair, a drink thrust into one hand, a cigar into the other. He glanced at Hank who was being given the same treatment.

"If this means termination, it's the nicest way I've ever been fired," said Joe to himself as he lighted his cigar.

The Boss moved around behind his desk and plopped into an overstuffed swivel-chair.

"Well," he chortled. "Well, I'm glad to see my two best vice-presidents are at ease. Are taking it easy. Are enjoying their tea-time."

Joe had no idea what to expect. Obviously, they weren't getting the boot. Joe wondered what sinister plan was being formulated behind those dignified wrinkles covering B.B.'s forehead.

"I suppose you gentlemen are curious as to why I've called you in here. Well, I'll be blunt. Gentlemen, some rival firm had won the day. Has frosted the cake. Has sugared the tea."

He leaned over the desk, peering at the two men through his horn-rimmed glasses which Joe knew were only props. The Boss had better eyesight than Joe.

"Blurble."

Hank choked on a sip of his

Pernod. Joe choked on a drag of his Havana-tampa. The Boss just choked.

Pulling a handkerchief from his breast pocket, he slipped the corner of it under his glasses and lightly dabbed at his eyes.

"Yes, some other firm has beaten us to the punch. Has won the race. Has taken the spoils. I'm sure that both of you are aware of the new advertising campaign to promote the sale of Blurble, whatever this may be. Since it is a product handled by some other firm, I'm not holding you responsible. After all, you can't very well be held for a crime you didn't commit. A lie you didn't tell. Fraud you didn't perpetuate."

The tone belied the words. Joe knew the Big Man would prosecute them if he didn't already have some scheme that involved them. He waited for the proposition he knew would soon be forthcoming.

"It is well known to me that you and Hank have aspired to higher planes of executive advancement. I've had my eye on the two of you for some time now, and just to be truthful, I can't decide which one of you would fill the shoes of Kingderry with the most promise."

Kingderry had been B.B.'s right hand man and V.P. num-

ber I. Unfortunately, he was too ambitious, and the Big Man had seen fit to have him removed. Kingderry was now serving eighteen years at San Quentin for fraud.

"So," continued the Boss, "I have decided to V.P. upper-echelon whichever of you brings me the Blurble account first. Go out and get the gravy. Retrieve the standard. Bring home the bacon!"

Joe wished the Big Boy would stop using those horrible, outdated colloquialisms. It was impossible to concentrate under the mental hailstorm created by the antiquated verbalisms.

With an airy wave of his well-groomed paw, the Boss dismissed the two young men who left via the same entrance they had entered by.

Molly met them at the door.

"Well, what happened?" she asked.

"Blurble . . ." muttered Hank, staring off into space.

"Blurble . . ." murmured Joe, gazing at nothingness.

Both men dashed for the door. Hank was in better shape and won the sprint by several feet.

Breathing heavily, Joe glared with Neanderthal hostility toward his once-again foe.

"Firstest with the mostest,"

sang out Hank, broadly beaming.

"The tortoise won the race," gasped Joe, overflowing with Indian stoicism.

Hank sprang lightly through the door and bounced down the stairs.

Joe decided to wait for the elevator. He was very much out of condition.

"Brains, not brawn, wins every race in this civilized world," he mumbled as he boarded the elevator and dropped from sight.

Back in the office Molly eased onto a desk-top, shaking her head. She wondered what the Big Man had said. However, she didn't worry. No matter who came out on top, she would be sitting next to him. She hoped it would be Hank. Singer was such a nice name.

Joe spent the day looking at Blurble advertisements on billboards, in the newspapers, plastered on fences; listening to Blurble spot commercials on TV, radio (both AM and FM), and not getting anywhere at all.

He was baffled. Joe had no idea after a full day's search as to what Blurble was or where Blurble came from. He was sure of one thing only.

All of the Blurble commer-

cials followed the same pattern. None of the advertisements explained what Blurble was; they only enticed buyers into buying.

It was a well-planned, cleverly-executed campaign. Joe had never seen one similar to it. Sadly, he had to admit to himself that whoever was promoting this enterprise was a genius head and shoulders above any other.

City lights were flickering on when Joe decided to give up for the day and return home. He had to admit defeat for the time being, but tomorrow would bring a different story, he hoped.

Hank and Molly were waiting for him when he arrived at his home.

Blushing, Molly re-arranged her hair while Hank unsuccessfully attempted to remove little red smears on and about his lips.

"Good evening," he said cheerfully.

Joe found himself casting about for a club so he would stand an equal chance with Hank. He didn't mind Hank mussing Molly, or even stealing into his house, but to have the gall to open and drink Joe's 200 year old brandy was a sin that Joe would never forgive.

"No doubt you are here to bring me bad tidings," stalled Joe, still looking for a blunt instrument.

"No doubt," cleverly retorted Hank.

Molly stood up. Smiling her sweetest smile, she angelically put her hands together.

"Hank and I are going to be married."

"Oh," said Joe, absently. "That's nice."

He was staring at the small package Hank dangled in front of him.

"Blurble?"

"Blurble."

"I thought so," sighed Joe. "What is it?"

"Seeds."

Joe squinted at the brown sack. "Seeds?"

"Yes, seeds. The manufacturer is carrying his own advertisement, and they won't have anything to do with other advertising firms here or abroad."

Joe shrugged. "Well, if that's the case, then how do you know . . ."

"Except under certain conditions," interrupted Hank. "And I've already agreed to them and signed them up. It's all settled."

He refilled his brandy glass. "Tough luck, old man, but the brightest light shines the most. The oak is taller than

the elm. The eagle flies higher than the sparrow."

Hank was beginning to sound like B.B.

Joe walked over to Molly and lightly brushed her hair with his lips.

"You win."

Molly smiled sweetly again. "I knew I would."

Joe turned to Hank. "Now, just what grows from a Blurble seed?"

Hank waggled his finger. "Tch, tch. That's one of the restrictions. No one knows, except the manufacturer, and he's not telling!"

"But that's ridiculous!" snorted Joe. "Who's going to buy something when they don't even know what it is?" Somehow, that sentence seemed stilted to Joe. He decided he needed a drink. Joe opened the liquor cabinet and removed a pony glass. He wanted some of his own precious brandy which was disappearing at an alarming rate.

"Not only that," pouted Molly, "but they won't sell the seeds to females. A man has to sign a contract to get seeds. No female gets a seed."

"What?" exclaimed Joe. He filled his small container from the brandy-bottle and slowly rotated it between his palms. If nothing else, he knew how to drink good brandy. Bale-

fully, he watched Hank chug-a-lug a good two ounces.

"That's right," said Hank, gulping. "Man, is that good brandy." He stared at the empty glass in his hand and then reached for the bottle. "I know the restrictions sound a little silly, but it was the only way I could sign them up—and you know what B.B. said."

"Oh well," shrugged Joe. "I know of a good janitorial job over on the east side."

"Nonsense," waved Hank. "I'm going to need good men working under me. You've got a job as long as you want it."

The thought of working under Hank spoiled the good taste of the brandy as it flowed into Joe's stomach.

Joe picked up the sack of Blurble seeds. "No thanks, Hank. I've got some money saved up. I'd rather resign quietly."

"It's up to you."

"There is one thing I'd like you to do for me, though," added Joe.

"Name it, and if it can be done, I'll do it."

"I want this sack."

"It's yours."

"Thanks."

Hank rose. "Now, if you don't mind, Molly and I will be on our way."

"No," said Joe absently, "I don't mind." He studied the brown sack.

Hank and Molly found their way out. After they had left, Joe opened the sack and dumped the contents onto the table.

One seed. One small, gnarled, lumpish-looking seed. Joe picked it up and tenderly carried it outside. He planted it in the darkness and returned inside. He was curious and wanted to see just what Blurble was. He would wait. He had time.

The next day Joe overslept for the first time in thirteen weeks. He opened his eyes and watched the bright sunlight pour into his room through the half-shut venetian blinds.

Fifteen minutes later he was sipping coffee at the breakfast table. Opening the newspaper, he began to read. His eyes locked on the headlines:

Blurble Craze Hits Nation Overnight

Blurble, a new product in the form of a seed, has become the nation's newest fad. No one knows what a Blurble seed is, but everyone—male, that is—has bought one. One is all the company will sell to an individual. Who knows what Blurble is? The only answer is

simply to plant your seed and wait along with other curious males.

Joe flipped on the radio and searched for news. He found it. A well-known commentator spoke for ten minutes on Blurble and its effect on the world. Having more up to date reports, he stated that Blurble seeds were not confined just to this country, but had been promoted throughout the entire world. He said that never had any one product been distributed over such a wide area so quickly. He guessed that by tomorrow noon every male in the world would have a Blurble seed planted, if sales kept on as they were.

Joe stood up and walked over to the window. He looked into the backyard and dropped the newspaper.

The Blurble seed had sprouted. Overnight it had grown at least four feet high. But it wasn't the rate of growth that had caused Joe to drop the newspaper, it was the shape the stalk had taken.

A woman. A beautiful, green woman. Perfectly proportioned and four feet high.

For fifteen minutes Joe stood transfixed at the window before he realized he could walk into the yard.

Outside, he wandered around the plant, staring in-

tently at it. Finally, he gathered up enough courage to reach out and touch it.

The skin of the plant felt surprisingly like Molly. Joe shook his head. The plant seemed too real. He had to find out more about it.

Dashing inside, he grabbed the phone and quickly dialed Hank's number. He answered after ten long rings.

"Who the hell's calling? I'm busy!"

"Hank! It's your old buddy-buddy, Joe!"

"Oh, hello Joe."

"Listen Hank, I've got to know more about this Blurble plant!"

"Umm, you've already planted yours?"

"Yes! Oh my God, Yes!" Joe cradled the phone close. "Tell me, what do you do with the plant?"

"Well," Hank was speaking with a certain degree of detachment, "so far all I know is what the circulars say. The plant will mature tomorrow. All the plants will mature at the same time—that's what I learned from the manufacturer."

Excitedly, Joe hopped around.

"But what happens when the plant matures?" he shouted into the receiver.

"—take shears and snip the

stalk just below the feet. She'll open her eyes, that's how'll you'll know it's time." Hank's voice became more and more detached. "These fellows sure know how to run an advertising campaign. Really know their stuff."

Joe danced up and down. "You mean she'll be alive and living and warm and—Hot Diggety Damn!" he sang out as he fell to the floor.

"Uh-huh. Now if you'll excuse, Joe, I've got to water my plant." The phone clicked as Hank hung up.

Joe left the phone and ran outside. He wanted to make sure his plant wasn't in need of water.

Joe spent the rest of the day erecting a canvas shelter to protect his Blurble plant from the hot sun, taking time only to water and spade the soil near the base of the stalk.

That night, before he went inside, he wrapped a woolen blanket around his plant to make sure it didn't die while he slept.

He was too excited to sleep, however, and he sat up, thinking how lucky he was to have lost Molly to Hank.

"Some people are lucky, some aren't," he said over and over to himself.

The doorbell buzzed. An-

noyed, Joe walked over to the door and answered it.

Molly flung herself into his arms.

"Oh Joe! I don't know what to do! Hank's left me and quit his job! All because of those nasty Blurble seeds!"

Joe scratched his lower lip with his teeth. *So what*, he thought.

"That's too bad," he said. "Why come to me?"

"You're the only one that can help me." She curled her little finger around his pajama top.

"You could take back your old job with the firm. B.B. nearly died when Hank quit. I'm sure he'd give you the V.P. number I spot if you returned."

Joe shook his head. "No thanks. Come on, I'll show you why!"

He ushered Molly through the house and into the kitchen where he slipped on the porch light.

The Blurble plant stood just inside the fringe of light from the porch.

"I've got one too! I don't need you any more. I've got a beautiful woman, and she's all mine!"

Molly started to speak but couldn't. She turned around and headed for the front door.

"Make sure you pull it

shut!" Joe called after her. His only answer was a loud slam.

Joe spent the rest of the night watching his Blurble plant through the kitchen window.

Joe stood silently, snipping shears in his hands. He was waiting for the woman perched on the stalk to open her eyes. He kicked several clods of dirt he had spaded the day before.

The plant opened its eyes. It was time. Joe gulped, and stared at the figure. She was so beautiful, Joe couldn't believe she would really be his. He stood there, then realized he had to cut her down.

Dropping to his knees, he carefully slipped the shears under her feet and clipped the stalk. He jumped up, ready to catch her as she fell.

She did not fall. Instead, the severed stalk disappeared into the ground, leaving the five foot seven female standing barefoot on the soil.

She spread her arms in a graceful motion and took one step forward.

Then she Blurbled.

Calmly, Joe Weidermeyer went insane.

All over the world excited men cut their green women from the stalks and went mad

as the tinted females began to Blurble. By that evening, not one sane male was left in any major city, town, or rurality.

The men who had planned the Blurble campaign shook hands with one another as reports from all over the world flooded their offices.

From every nook and cran-

ny poured forth men with green skins, washed clean of the flesh-colored camouflage they had worn only a short time ago in an unsuspecting world.

They met their green-skinned women and together they happily Blurbled.

The invasion had begun.

THE END