

Mr. Universe

By Glenn Gray

I know it. If it weren't for the humongous juice dosages I woulda been Mr. Universe. I mean, if not Mr. U then something pretty close, like maybe Mr. A. I had it all, the genetics, the proportion - and I could pose like a professional dancer. Not like some faggot, but I mean I could flow through the moves like honey in slow motion pouring from a bottle. I was on my way.

Then friggin roid rage.

And just because I killed my best friend with my bare hands don't make me all that bad a guy either. It was the shit. Christ, I loved the guy like a brother.

We're in the locker room at Iron Plate Gym, me and my best friend Stevie, all revved up cause we just got our first juice delivery from Big Bobby. Fuckin Bobby and his white 79 Corvette. Never knew how that guy with twenty two inch guns fit in that thing anyway.

Big Bob handed me a crumpled paper bag with a few boxes of Deca and a bottle of D-bol tabs and said, "You're on your own," and went to work out. He threw in a few darts so we'd be ready to start right away. Big sport.

We're staring at all this gear in the bag and I'm thinking that this was it, that I'm gonna be in the big time now. That's right. I was primed to get huge like the other freaky gym monsters. Only bigger.

Stevie fishes out a syringe and I pull out a box of Deca. I howl and say, "Look," as I chomp off the top of the cardboard box and dump the vial into my hand, spitting the wet flap onto the floor. We're carrying on like two friggin kids.

I pinch the glass up to the light and say, "Breakfast of champions," and we both bust out and do a high five. Joey Napoli walks in and looks at us, so we cool out. We go into the small bathroom, barely big enough for two guys on their way to the kingdom of huge.

I grab the dart from Stevie, peel open the wrapper and pop off the needle cap. I snatch a bottle of rubbing alcohol from my gym bag and splash some on toilet paper and wipe the rubber top of the vial. I stick the needle in, turn it upside down and suck out the full 2 cc's of oily stuff.

I say, "Me first."

Stevie says, "Fine," and then he says, "Dude, I ain't shootin your ass."

I call him a pussy and say, "I'll do it myself." I face the sink and undo my sweat pants. I let them drop to expose my glutes.

I wipe my skin with alcohol, lean on the porcelain with one hand and say, "Bombs away," then plunge the spike, push down hard, forcing the Deca into my ass muscle. It stings a little and I could swear the juice started to work right then and there - but I know it ain't so.

I felt like my life had changed somehow, like I was in some new exclusive club. I guess I was. At the time I thought the change was for the better, but little did I know it

was the beginning of the friggin end.

One time me and Stevie meet this older guy at the gym, his name is Richard and he tells us if we want to really be cool we should get into Manhattan and forget about all this Long Island suburban crap. They're all losers out there, he says.

I think, whatever, but I have a feeling this guy is weird and one night we go into the city, a place downtown in the West Village. I forget the name. It don't matter and all I remember is people screwing around all over in these dark concrete chambers. I was like, friggin, yeah.

It was some sex club and you had to be a member and this guy Rich just showed a card at the door and the bouncer said, "Go head boys." Guess he'd been there before.

There was this amazon chick in shiny leather pulling a guy around on a leash and he's licking her black spiked boots and she's kicking him and he just keeps apologizing. Man, what a pussy the guy was.

Me and Stevie look at each other and almost at the same time we say, "What the fuck?" And then we just start cracking up. Richard glares at us like we should chill out or something. Like we're breakin the rules or some shit.

Another naked lady has her hands tied to a wood beam above her head and this guy in a mask is whipping her. He's got the littlest dick around, like a turtle head poking out from his fat sack. Not that I was lookin or anything. This lady moans in the dark and then he rams her with the handle of the whip. She lifts her legs off the ground like she's riding a jet ski and screams so loud it hurts my ears.

After a couple beers I gotta go to the can, so I weave my way through the stone chambers and smoky haze, like I'm exploring some ancient tomb or something. In slashes of light, I see this skinny guy wearing only cowboy boots lounging inside one of those long urinals like he's at the beach, one leg draped over the side. And he's loving it.

I stood in the shadows, eyes burning with the smell of urine and smoke, thinking: *What the fuck?* I watched two guys finish spraying the cowboy with piss like they're putting out a fire. He rubbed it in like lotion and groaned and said, "Next."

He's lookin at me and smiling - and I really had to go, so I ended up taking a whiz on his boots.

After a few months of juicing like an animal, I'm getting huge and Stevie slows down on his shit and tells me, "Maybe you should cool it for a while."

I tell him, "No way," cause I'm getting jacked and I want to enter a show. Probably the Mr. Long Island to start things off.

Stevie says, "What about college?"

I say, "Screw that." I keep training and training and getting bigger and bigger.

Stevie is getting ready to go to college, Mr. Frat Boy. I got my eye on the Mr. Teenage USA contest the August after graduation in Venice Beach, California.

Somebody tells me that Venice is the Mecca of all bodybuilding and that fires me up even more.

California here I come.

Another time, a group of us cut school on a freaky warm April day. We hop in Stevie's Chevelle and cruise over to Jones Beach.

We packed a cooler full of Bud quickies we picked up at Seven-Eleven. Sherrie and Michele were in the car with us - Michele with her blonde hair falling over her shoulders, smelling like goddamn spring flowers or something. I knew that Stevie liked Michele cause she was much hotter, but Michele liked me and it was obvious. She kept saying things to me like, "Wow you're getting so big," and, "I love your muscles," as she scraped her spike-like fingernails across my forearm hair.

I could see Stevie out the corner of my eye with that stupid look on his face.

I don't like to say it, but Stevie just didn't have what I had, you know? Even though he was my best friend and all, he just didn't have good genetics, I guess. You need the genetics to win shows. That's what I read in Iron Man Mag.

And even though he juiced for a while it didn't seem to do anything. Me, I just got bigger and people told me I could probably win a big show some day. I already knew that though.

When we get to the beach, we spread out a towel and blast some Van Halen and kick back. That was when I told Stevie I was gonna go to California after graduation.

He says, "That's stupid, dude."

I say, "Really?" Right then I wanted to punch him, hard. He was leaning back on the towel, hands behind his head, like he had everything under control, like some wise old man.

He started telling me about all the college crap and says, "What're you gonna do? Be a muscle man?" And how was I gonna make money and all that.

Like all of a sudden he's got some attitude like he's better or something, like he's gonna be some doctor or lawyer. Guy's clueless.

So it was great cause right then Michele comes jogging up to the towel with her tits bouncing in her tube-top, nipples hard, and says to me, all flirty-like, she says, "Come down to the water, hot stuff." In my head I was laughing like crazy.

She has her hand out, so I take it and she pulls me up.

As we saunter away hand in hand, I turn back to Stevie and he's got that stupid smirk on his face again.

I'm smiling, feeling like a pig in shit.

Things were going pretty much as planned with the California trip and all, except me and Michele were getting kinda tight and she was getting a bit latch-y. I could never understand these chicks.

The whole thing was starting to get on my nerves cause I had big plans you know? To be Mr. Universe. I didn't need some whiny chick getting in my face.

She says things like, "You know you're taking this muscle stuff a little too serious," and, "You're still taking that shit, cause I think your balls are getting like little

grapes.”

When she said that last thing I let the back of my hand sort of slide across her face, not really like a hard slap, but she took it that way, her face getting all red and splotchy. And all the crying. Man, it was crazy. I’m lookin around, rolling my eyes.

I said I didn’t mean it. It just happened, like a little switch in my skull clicked or something. I knew the juice was fucking with my head.

She just cried.

And then she really pissed me off cause she said, “Why can’t you be more like Stevie.”

I lost it.

Lucky I didn’t hit her because my fist smashed right through the sheetrock wall in my basement.

The next time I go to the city with Richard, it’s just me and him. Stevie says he has to study. We end up back in Greenwich Village. I was like, whatever.

We’re in this smoky bar and two guys are making out and I say to Richard, “The heck is that?” These guys were like hairy and shit and had some muscle and it just didn’t look right.

He says, “The city, just the way it is.”

We leave that place cause he says I got all quiet, and I was. I was trying to make sense of the shit I was seeing.

So he takes me to another place that’s more of a disco club and there are some chicks, but they’re making out too. Hot chicks no less.

Rich just smiles, shrugs.

I say, “I’m outta here.”

After a while, Stevie stops training altogether cause he says he’s got some other stuff to focus on and why don’t I chill too. Take a break. Like I’m thinking, yeah right.

I’m bigger than ever and my neck feels like it’s gonna explode out of every shirt I wear. My thighs rub together on the inside cause they’re like two tree trunks, and I got cuts and veins running all over my body like lightening bolts.

I up the juice dosages cause I figure it’s three months to the show in California and I wanna peak out right on time.

I start cutting some classes at school, but it doesn’t matter cause it’s the end of the year and I got better things planned anyway. Like I’m ever gonna need the crap I’m learning.

I’m gonna be Mr. Universe someday.

I’m right on target for huge success as I see it, but nobody sees it like I do. I feel like I’m living in my own little world. Everyone else is just putzing along.

It’s going great until Michele calls me and she tells me she’s pregnant.

One time near the end of all this I'm at Richard's house and we smoke a joint and suck down some beers and we're cranking Led Zeppelin.

He takes out a sandwich baggie and it's got a lot of different colored pills in it. He pulls out a red one and says, "Take this, it'll really relax you."

I ask what it is and he says, "A downer."

I shrug and take it. Not long after, I'm feeling really groggy and weird but it's kinda cool.

Richard falls back on his bed, looking at the ceiling and says, "Man, I know a way a stud like you can make a lot of money."

I say, "Really?"

He starts telling me about how muscle dudes can go into the city and pose for guys and get paid tons of cash.

I say that sounds kinda fucked and he says, "No, it's cool."

I'm really starting to feel funny and he says, "Try it, take off your clothes. I'll show you."

I stand up, thinking I gotta get out of there and he says, "Where you going?"

I step back. He hops up and walks toward me, smiling. I see this big happy mug headed my way, a weird look on his face, just like I thought all along.

The last thing I remember is his hand cupping my nuts before the switch clicked.

When I can see straight again, he's crumpled on the floor with a bloody face staring up at me and he's breathing funny and trying to talk.

I just say, "What the fuck?"

I don't remember driving home.

Michele actually says, "What if we had it?"

I say, "You gotta be kidding."

She says, "We'd be a family."

I start telling her about how there's no way a guy like me can have a baby now, at this age, especially with all the plans I had. I'm thinking to myself, can she really be serious?

I ask her what is she gonna do when I go to California in a couple months and she says, "Yeah, right."

I tell her we gotta get this situation taken care of pronto and she cries and says, "No way," and jumps right out of my car at a stoplight.

I have to roll alongside her in the car for about a mile before she gets back in. With a face like a rock-hard boulder, staring straight ahead, she says, "Fine."

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Not long after that, Mrs. Cartwright from the main office pokes her stupid head into my English class and says there's a phone call for me. I figure it must be serious, cause no one ever gets a phone call like that at school.

When I pick it up it's my mom. She says, "Come right home after school."

I ask her why and she says to just do it and her voice sounds funny. I'm thinking, okay, this is weird.

When I get home she leads me to her bedroom where she's got all my roids scattered out on her bed. She's got the pills and the vials and all the syringes spread out. She's got tears in her eyes and she says, "What's this stuff?"

I smile cause I know what she's thinking. She found my stash. Before I can answer, she says: "Well what is it, uppers or downers or what?"

I chime right in, grinning, "Yeah, and sidewaysers too."

She doesn't like that and bursts out crying. I tell her to calm down and then I tell her about the juice and how it's really a good thing. That she should be lucky that I'm not doing hardcore shit. And how come she's going through my stuff anyway?

She tells me to just wait until my father gets home.

When he walks through the door, my mom tells him the story. He comes to me, and as he throws his hardhat onto the chair, says: "Wipe the grin off your mug."

I say, "What grin?" and I can see he's had a crappy day.

He says, "You're a fuckup," He starts to swing at me and I duck.

The switch clicks.

My head spins and things just happen. I clock him on the side of the head, and he falls back into my mom. They both crash onto a desk and end up on the floor. Shit.

I scoop up the roids and bolt.

I jump into my 76 Monte Carlo and tear down the street, tires screeching.

I don't even know where I'm going.

I slide a Black Sabbath cassette into the player and Ozzy is yelling and I crank up the volume and the speakers are thumping and I can't believe I just smacked my old man.

I swerve onto the main strip near my house and some guy cuts me off. In a fuckin Pacer no less. He doesn't even wave or anything, and this pisses me off. I speed up, getting alongside this guy. He knows I'm right there and he doesn't look at me, just stares straight ahead and we're going faster and faster.

I lean over and crank down the window, almost losing control and the wind is blowing in my face. I yell, "Hey, douchebag," and he just ignores me.

I pull closer to him and start running him to the curb - now he starts honking and he slows down cause he has no choice. Then I see him take a sideways glance at me.

He's starting to shit in his pants.

We finally come to a halt and I jump out of the car, running around the front toward him. Now he looks like a chicken-shit. He's got a pencil neck. He throws it in reverse and slams a parked car before he speeds away, smashing a couple of garbage cans in the process.

I do a loud, "Yee-haa," and yell full-out, "That's right a-wipe."

I slide back in my car, feeling pumped, and decide to go over Stevie's.

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When I get to Stevie's, I see that Michele's car is parked out front and I wonder

what the fuck is going on.

I make my way around to the side door that leads to the basement where Stevie's room is and I let myself in. My head is really hot now and I feel like I got a wicked headache. My heart is racing like never before and my body feels like it's tingling.

When I get to the bottom of the stairs, I see the two of them sitting on the bed and Stevie's hugging Michele. What are they, like long-time lovers? They both see me and turn and jump and Michele starts right in saying, really fast, "We were just talking," and, "I needed somebody to talk to."

Stevie saying, "Hey man, what's up?" And, "It's not how it looks," and he's got that stupid smirk on his face.

It was the smirk that really did it for me.

And the switch goes off.

The switch has a loud bang and I swear, this time, I can actually hear the sound like a sonic boom. *BOOM SHEEEESH.*

The rest is a blur.

Later, Michele tells people how she never saw a person pick someone up by the neck with one hand, only in cartoons. And she never, ever, saw a look like the one I had in my eyes.

She flew out of the room screaming and got help. Nobody saw what happened next, not even me, cause I don't remember anything, just the click and then the white flash.

All they know is that when the police came in, I was sobbing and had Stevie's dead body draped across my lap.

They say I was mumbling something to him and rocking him like a baby.

Glenn Gray is a Radiologist in private practice. His stories have appeared in Thuglit 16, Blazing Adventures Magazine, DZ Allen's Muzzle Flash, Powder Burn Flash, Bewildering Stories, Underground Voices and OOTG 3. He has upcoming flash in Shred Of Evidence.