

Unexpected Angst at Area Semaphore



By Mike Common

On a beautiful Summer Day, walking down Massachusetts Avenue, I found myself suddenly berated by a voice from an undisclosed location.

"Hey, up here, it's me. It's safe to go now. Don't tell them I said this, but you've got only 6 or 7 more seconds to go before its too dangerous. Come on man, hurry the fuck up. We haven't got all day here."



As far as I knew, there were no people above my head, but I've been wrong before. Nevertheless, as I crossed the street, I gazed skyward and all I could see were a few clouds, some power lines, and the stoplight/semaphore at the corner of the street I had just crossed. Then I saw him. It was the Green Guy.

"Hey Green Guy. How's it going, I said. Thanks for the warning, even though it was a rather brusque one. Although there's like zero traffic right now, I sure do appreciate the good word. Take care now."



"Wait, sir. Please wait. I wanted to thank you personally for walking when my signal was showing. I mean, most people don't even pay attention to me any more. They walk when the red hand is up more than when I'm up there. They just walk whenever there's no cars. When they, in their own judgement think its safe. Who are they to judge? I'm the judge, dammit! I say when it's safe. This is the state of Massachusetts god dammit! Where do they think they are, fucking California? Where J-walking is the law. Oh, sorry, ma'am, you're strolling down the sidewalk again. I'm gonna have to give you a ticket! And yeah, you, mister. You're shoes haven't touched asphalt in months. Two tickets, and no soup for you! This isn't San Friggin Cisco. This is Cambridge-Fucking-Massachusetts. The land of our forefathers. J-walking wasn't part of the constitution. Why do I constantly feel like I'm talking to myself out here?"

"Cause you are you little bitch." Said another voice as the Green Guy temporarily winked out of existence. "No one gives a fuck. And in fact, if you don't shut up with your annoying ass shit, I'll bitch slap you like a motherfucker." The Red Hand Girl was evidently a bit ill tempered today, or perhaps always.

Red Hand Girl also had this to say to us, regarding bitch slapping. "I'm actually not that good at much else. You know. Don't walk. Bitch slap. Don't walk. Bitch slap. It's kind of hard to do much else when you're a fucking red hand. But shit, I ain't complaining. The only one complaining here is my lousy, good for nothing, roommate here, Green Guy. Thinks he's the only one in the world who's got problems. Shit, I've got more problems than a calculus exam."

The diatribe/harangue continued..."People are always walking even though I'm up there with a symbol that is the most obvious universal form of no. Sit your ass down on the curb till I put my hand down, is what I'm saying. But nobody listens. And the irony of it all is, that I am red, and a hand, and I always catch them red handed, but it still don't mean shit. I give them a bitch slap, but they still keep going. I say, shit, walk your law-breaking, authority not-giving-a-shit-about, fat ass back to the other side of the street, but its always to no avail. People just go where they want to go."

"People don't even need us anymore," Red Hand Girl waxed philosophically. "Pretty soon they'll get rid of us, then traffic lights, then lanes, then society. It will be anarchy all over the world. And it will all be traced back to this kind of shit."

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A woman presently began to cross the street, absent mindedly reading a newspaper and sipping a Venti Chai Tea from Starbucks that she was about to refill, while fumbling somehow for her cell phone.

"Hey girlfriend. Don't you go nowhere! You better not cross this street. Talk to the hand, but keep your feet right where they at. Take one more step and I'll bitch slap you back to the womb. You hear me..." The angry rant faded into the mist as the Green Guy once again appeared.

"Oh just give it a rest. You can't even bitch slap anyone. You're just a red lamp shining through a hand shaped cutout, governed by a digital timer. You can't even really talk. And neither can I. We're just stuck here, chained to death on this God forsaken semaphore. And to be fair, I'm not even a Green Guy...I'm more of a dirty, off white color, and the Red Hand Girl is really much closer to orange, almost a passion fruit kind of tone. But it doesn't even matter what color we are. We're just useless technology perched on the cliff of obsolescence."



"Only the semaphores at major intersections still haven any real power. Probably because people actually would die if they didn't pay attention to the infinitely wise walk/don't walk instructions. Take, for example, the one in Harvard Square, with the timer. You can argue that by telling people that they have exactly 40 seconds to walk before getting mowed down by three taxicabs and a seafood truck, you remove a bit of the mystery from the semaphore experience, but I'll tell you, people fucking listen, and that's what its all about."

"I see what you mean, Green Guy. I'm glad we had this talk. You learn something new every day."

"Oh, thanks for listening, Mister. Sorry for taking up your time. If you get a chance, please listen to the other Green Guys, and even the Red Hand Girls. We all have something to say."

"Are all the other Red Hand Girls so angry and bitch slap happy?"

"No, most of the other ones are pretty nice...its just this girl, I don't know what to..."

"I heard that."

And although I doubt it now, as I sauntered down the street towards home, I couldn't help but feel like I heard a sharp cracking sound, and what appeared to be a pitiful yelp in a voice sounding very much like the Green Guy. When I then felt what could be called more than just a slight breeze, it seemed reasonable to attribute such air motion to the aftershock of a well placed bitch slap.

But then again, I'm just a pedestrian, and what do we know?



Murray, go get me some coffee.
Oh, give it a rest, Rose. Get your own coffee. I'm going for a walk.