
THIS NEVER HAPPENS IN IRVINE

And other stories

by Alex S. Park

This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories

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THIS NEVER HAPPENS IN IRVINE

Peter sat in the hallway listening to his wife making love in the bedroom. The man's name was This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories Greg, one of her sister's friends. Peter was waiting for them to finish, and for the inevitable encounter that would soon follow. He did not know who would step into the hallway first. His wife was slow to rise after sex and so he figured it would be Greg, possibly on his way to take a post-coital piss. It did not occur to Peter to interrupt, to catch them in the act. He was not that This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories kind of a person. He would wait until they finished. He would wait until one of them stepped out. They made sounds but the sounds did not bother Peter. The This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories only thing that bothered him was the thought of the This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories encounter that was soon to take place.

It was then he remembered the graffiti and the kid at the DMV several weeks ago. He had been waiting for two hours to renew his license when the kid sat next to him. The kid had short blond hair This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories and wore baggy jeans. Peter looked down at the kid's number and realized he had a long wait ahead of him. Nothing about the place interested Peter. It was the DMV and there was nothing memorable about it. He hated waiting and he closed his eyes. Fifteen minutes later he opened them. He glanced at the kid and saw that he was doodling in a notebook, the word, "ELAN," in elaborate, square letters. Peter closed his eyes again and opened them several called numbers later. The This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories kid had moved onto another drawing but he could see the first doodling This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories and realized that the This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories letter L was actually an asymmetrical V. Peter figured it was the kid's name.

Eventually he renewed his license and eventually he forgot about the kid's drawing. Until the day of the party when his wife required him to pick up flowers for the coffee table. She had already This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories selected This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories and pre-ordered them. His only task was to pick This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories them up and bring them home and set them on the This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories coffee table. But it was on the other side of the city, in a newly developed area he wasn't familiar with and he made several U-turns. He made one of these This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories turns under a freeway overpass and as he released the brake and accelerated, he saw the words, "EVAN," sprayed on the concrete. Peter made a U-turn at the next intersection and returned to the overpass. He got a close look

as he made another U-turn and realized that the graffiti was in the same style as the one the kid was doodling in the notebook. Peter wondered how long it would be before they painted over it. This was Irvine. There was no graffiti This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories in Irvine.

Eventually he picked up the flowers and brought them home and placed them on the coffee table. The party started at seven but he showered and dressed and he came down at eight. Several women complemented his wife on the flowers. The flowers were pink. Peter drank Scotch and helped himself to several servings of coconut-cream pie. He saw Greg with his wife. They were standing close to each other listening to someone telling a story, and it wouldn't have meant anything but he had seen them outside the gym few weeks earlier. Peter was in This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories his car, on the street, forty miles per hour but he could see them. Kissing, holding hands, more than enough.

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He went to the kitchen and joined several women who were talking about the graffiti.

"Did you see it?" said one of the women.

"Yes, under the Jamboree overpass," the woman said.

"It's horrible," said the woman. "It can't be there too long."

"No, the city will get it removed," the woman said.

"I don't think you can remove it," said the woman, "They just cover it up."

"But what if they don't have the right This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories color paint?" the woman said.

"It'll probably look different," said the woman.

"That's most unfortunate," the woman said, "We won't see the graffiti, but we'll always know it was there."

"What's this city coming to?" said the woman.

Peter This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories left the conversation before his presence could be upgraded to participant. He sat outside in the back, smoking a cigar. The cigar was long and then it burned shorter and shorter until it was time to stamp This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories it out and discard. The party ended and the people went home and he went to sleep and then he went to work the next day.

In the afternoon he drove out to the Jamboree overpass and saw that the graffiti had been covered, and as the women had talked about, the paint contrasted against the concrete. Peter wondered if the kid knew how quickly his work would be painted over when he was doodling it at the DMV. He turned around and got on Irvine Boulevard and into the heart of the

city that rival high school football teams from Santa Ana and Garden Grove called the Plastic City. He first heard that term years ago when he lay over the twenty-yard marker, a victim of a safety blitz. Standing over Peter, and in the same, trash-talking way an opposing player would say, "mother-fucker," the DB shouted, "Fuck you, Plastic City."

For a long time Peter did not know what it meant. And then he had two theories. Theory number one: plastic, as in artificial. As in the planned community where shops had to be a certain distance from residential areas. As in the huge trees planted in perfect rows in the center of huge boulevards, and the absence of phone and electric wires, which were all underground. As in the two man-made lakes, creating a waterfront in the middle of the desert. Second theory: plastic, as in cards. The cards that teens scratched for Gucci and other things that residents of neighboring Santa Ana could only dream of.

But then in his early thirties, the term took on a new meaning when his old childhood neighborhood, "The Glens," was targeted for redevelopment. When he was a child, there weren't too many blacks or Hispanics in Irvine, but those that were there all lived in the Glens. It was a low-income area, yuppie city's version of the projects, conceived by the first city council that wanted to create This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories a sense of economic diversity. And for many years it worked. Peter's family, recent immigrants from Korea, was able to move out of West Anaheim and to Irvine, which had better schools and This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories gang-free streets, and which at the This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories time, was ranked eighth safest city in the country with a population over one-hundred thousand.

Then years later, long after Peter's family had moved to a five-bedroom house with city-lights view in the southern area of the city called Turtle Rock, This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories the drive-by shooting in front of the Light Stand Pizzeria happened. The two black youths arrested lived in the Glens. So did the three Hispanics involved in a knife fight on the Woodbridge High campus. Other crimes followed, all linked to the neighborhood, although in more than one occasion, it was This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories eventually determined the culprits had come from other parts of the city. Soon the cops, who had previously been occupied parked in front of high schools waiting for jaywalkers, were busy keeping watch at the Glens, holsters unfastened. Strangely enough, the rents at the Glens apartments went up, not down. City officials cited increasing value of the city, but those affected knew some kind of a deal had been made. Residents left, homes emptied, the area was designated for redevelopment and now a shopping center stood in the neighborhood where Peter once lived. Crime dropped This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories and Peter realized that Irvine was plastic, as in plastic case. A CD, a new toy, coconut-cream pie...all encased for protection. The city officials were trying to delay what Peter believed to be the inevitable encroachment of This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories the outside.

These thoughts crossed his mind because he sat in the hallway waiting for the inevitable encounter that was soon to take place. The sounds had ceased. His wife sighed. It wasn't long now before one of them would step out to the hallway. Peter was prepared for

Greg's nudity if it would, in fact, be Greg to step out first. He would look him in the eyes, allow him to get dressed if he wanted to. Peter waited in the hallway. The pits of his dress shirt were drenched. He heard soft breathing. They were This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories sleeping. They were unaware that Peter had quit his job and had come home early.

In the morning he had gone to work with no thoughts of quitting but after a staff meeting at nine o'clock, he went This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories to the president and told him he was giving up his vice-presidency. The president offered a raise, vacation time, perks, but by ten thirty, Peter was reversing out of his corporate parking space for the last time, This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories his tie already undone. He had seen before he left home that his wife This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories had scribbled 11:00 on a notepad, which his wife often did even though she never forgot an appointment, especially when it had something to do with Greg. He was almost home when This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories he realized he was too early and turned around and drove awhile. Eventually he ended up on Jamboree and so he drove to the underpass where the graffiti had been. During the morning staff meeting, an intern had mentioned that the graffiti had resurfaced, the exact graffiti in the same place. As he drove by, Peter This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories saw that the city had already painted over it.

Peter got an early lunch at McDonald's and thought about his son who now lived in Westwood, a pre-med sophomore at UCLA. Peter remembered the first time he became conscious of the moment. His son was five. They were at the park and Peter was sitting on a swing watching his son playing in the sand. Time froze and he became conscious of the moment. The boy's tiny hands. The red shovel. The boy's dirt-stained Spiderman T-shirt and matching blue shorts. The way the boy was flinging the sand in the air. The sand This Never Happens in Irvine and Other Stories tossed and dispersed like fireworks. His toy truck half buried. His black hair. The sand. When the moment became memory, it was clearer and more vivid than other memories.

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