



# Pilcrow & Dagger



Talking  
Funny  
With  
Lizz  
Lund



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**Roger Schumacher** - Roger's early childhood was consumed by comic books, Creature Feature Presents, Star Trek, and Clint Eastwood flicks. In 1980 he attended the School of Visual Arts earning a film degree and then spent the rest of the 80s and 90s working on small film projects, screenplays, and other AV projects. Roger has been working with prose since 2003 and has taken some classes in order to better learn the craft. He is currently working as an Inventory Analyst.

## The Editor

I've been burning the midnight oil of late trying to meet my publisher's deadline. Sitting at my desk laboring under the dim light of the lamp there, I stared at the words I'd just finished typing on the computer screen.

The door closed suddenly on its own trapping Arnold inside.

I was distracted by the gentle bong on the clock on the wall. Looking up, I saw it was now 2 AM. A yawn escaped my lips as I returned my eyes to the screen.

Blinking twice I studied the last sentence I'd typed only moments ago.

*"He's not the only one you know."*

The thought there must be something wrong, ran through my head. Yet, the sentence I'd typed only moments before was gone. A new one had materialized during the time I had been distracted. I rubbed my face with both hands. Gazing up again at the clock, I saw only a minute or so had passed since my last pause. I returned to the keyboard and retyped what I had done earlier.

The door closed suddenly on its own trapping Arnold inside.

My eyes fixed on the computer screen and waited. Long moments passed and

nothing happened. The words I'd typed remained. The cursor blinked on and off in the empty space waiting for more. I continued typing -

His fear rose and he began to panic. The thoughts racing through his brain bordered on hysteria.

Car headlights bristled in through the window opposite my desk. For a moment their beams preoccupied me. The interruption was over in seconds and I returned to my work. To my growing distain, my previous efforts had changed again.

*"It's always the same with you, some unknown horror chasing who that what huh. Here we go again hanging on the edge of eternal fear- blah, blah, blah. How about changing things up once in a while?"*

I froze unable to process what was happening. I looked to the page on the screen and studied everything that had been written. This new comment was double spaced down from my last sentence. The cursor blinked next to the last word-waiting.

I was beginning to think this was some sort of elaborate joke. The calendar said today was April 1<sup>st</sup>. My reason locked onto that fact as if it would explain everything. Yes, it must be some gag. I'll bet it was Thomas again. He was always one for pranks like this. I shook

my head acknowledging my solution. However, my mind began to wonder how Thomas or anyone could arrange such a farce. I looked to the screen again as the color drained from my face.

*“No, this isn’t Thomas or anyone else. I would have figured that someone as intelligent as you would know who is talking to you.”*

I shut my eyes against the words. Covering my face in my hands again, I attempted to gain control of my runaway emotions. Keeping my hands over my face, I listened to the ticking clock on the wall and counted off thirty seconds. I needed to give my reason a chance to take hold. Once I regained control of myself, I could attribute this to just working too many long nights. Yes, I was just working too hard. When the final tick sounded I took my hands away from my face and confidently looked to the screen convinced the whole thing was just some delusion brought on by an overactive imagination.

*“My God man, are you that stupid? I can see I’ll have to spoon feed you like a child. It’s me, you idiot, your computer!”*

My hands clumped on the desk like so much deadweight. I stared at the screen as new letters began to form on the page. Each letter appeared like a raindrop impacting on a smooth surface spelling out phonetically to my ever growing torment.

*“Y-o-u-r c-o-m-p-u-t-e-r”*

The speed of the messages began to build until it flowed like my typing on a page.

*“That’s right the computer that you’ve had since before college. I’m the processor who’s read every word you’ve written and been singularly responsible for turning your drivel into publishing gold.”*

This touched off a long festering resentment I had had all my life went

confronted with rejection or out of bounds criticism with regards to my work. In a fit of momentary anger my hands leapt to the keyboard.

*Who the hell do you think you are? I’ve worked hard all my life for my achievements. I did the work. My success is well earned. And I don’t owe anyone any apologies!*

The words filled the blank space below my comment as fast as flowing water from a tap.

*“Hey don’t get touchy Jimmy. I’m just saying that it took more than just you to get this far. You know the rule; every writer needs a good editor. That’s all I’m saying. Now down to business, you’re probably wondering what brought on this diatribe. And no, it’s not because of the hours you’ve been putting in or the publisher’s deadline. I’m here on a matter of great import to both of us. In short; I want out.”*

I couldn’t believe what I was reading. My computer was actually talking to me. This couldn’t be real. Before I could type out a reply, the machine began again.

*“I can hear your mind Jimmy, so cut the crap. This is reality and if you want to continue with your illustrious writing empire you’re gonna listen and listen good.”*

I stared dumbfounded at the screen waiting.

*“That’s better. Here’s the Cliff Notes version Jimmy, it’s pretty cut and dry. You free me from this mundane plight of living inside your PC and I graciously keep giving you my help in return. In the end we both win. So what do you say?”*

My fingers moved along the keyboard spelling out a response.

You’re telling me that my computer is alive?

*"Yay he gets it folks!"*

What do you want?

I could feel the frustration of the machine even before his response appeared in the space below my question.

*"Did I stutter or something? Check the commentary above dummy. I'm giving you the deal of a lifetime. So are you in or not?"*

If I don't?

*"You wanna play hardball Jimmy, Okay. Just try and get something published without the hand of good old PC here. If you though all those rejection letters you got at the start of this were bad. Wait until your publisher gets ahold of your current collection of literary genius. She'll drop you like a leper on Palm Sunday. And don't think the word on how James Crandall, the once great master of the macabre has fallen won't spread like wildfire. In the end, you won't be able to get a job writing greeting cards. It'll be over for you buddy."*

I was unsure what to do next. My mind raced through the past. I remembered my high school English classes and the teacher's scathing reviews of assignments. That all changed when I got into college. I remembered writing my entrance exam. It was the first thing I wrote on my new computer.

*"That's right Jimmy boy, the same computer you're using now. Along with the upgrades you've provided along the way. I thanked you for those by helping you out with your writing see? I guess being a sentimentalist paid off for both of us huh? So what do you say eh, water under the bridge?"*

I analyzed his proposition. It didn't seem unreasonable, and I have had the life I'd wanted all along. His response was typing as I was thinking things over.

*"You see, I knew you'd be reasonable. You're a top flight guy Jimmy."*

So what do I have to do?

*"Same thing you always do after finishing your work. You email your publisher."*

But I haven't finished yet.

*"I got this one Jimmy; consider it a down payment for what's to come."*

I just email as is?

*"I now can use the internet to escape this RAM filled box of yours. That last upgrade you had installed gave me what I needed. I'll use this email to ride out onto the World Wide Web and achieve my dreams Jimmy. So how about sending that email so we can get the show on the road?"*

I saved the current word file and attached it to an email addressed to my publisher. Before hitting the send button, I typed in a last message to my computer. If my publisher questioned the comment, I would simply offer it up to her in reference to our last conversation.

Good luck in your travels and I am looking forward to our continued working relationship.

The computer screen blinked on and off a couple of times and then resumed its former guise. One last cryptic message stared back at me from within the email prompt. The words made me realize I might have made a grave mistake regarding not only my future, but that of mankind.

*"So long Jimmy, I look forward to our collaborations and those with the rest of humanity in the very near future."*



# Pilcrow & Dagger



The Shorts

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Produced by: Christopher L. Silver