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## MY HAWAIIAN SHIRTS

They receive a whole hell of a lot of praise, to be perfectly frank. People look at my Hawaiian shirts and think, *Now that's a garment that communicates a strong interest in partying.* Those same people also tell me that they remind them of that spotted dog from the '80s, the alcoholic that was always hanging around beach volleyball courts.

I don't let the compliments go to my head, though. I know who's doing all of the heavy lifting.



You'd think I'd developed the vaccine for tennis elbow, the way the register girls at Kohl's lay it on nice and thick.

"This line's closed. I'm on my break."

They're teens, and they could easily pass for tweens, but that's not important. What's important is the serious monkey business they know I'm going to get into later that evening when I throw on one of my Hawaiian shirts. Shenanigans like competitive eating and games of chance, tractor pulls and ostrich fights. Whoever's responsible for their training is doing a bang-up job, though, because they never let on that they're driving themselves positively bananas trying to get to the bottom of what my recreation schedule is going to look like. Probably the same Brits who hire the Buckingham Palace guards, is my guess.

"A magician never reveals his secrets," I tell them as I lay those Bad Boys down on the counter. Then I just sit back and let my Hawaiian shirts' playful color schemes and flourishing vegetation do the rest of the talking for me.



I got my first Hawaiian shirt during Operation Iraqi Freedom. I was living in Tampa at the time, and my next-door neighbor, Claude, was trying to unload a box of them before he died. They were mine to take if I could stomach the smell in his garage, which I would describe as a potpourri of lawn clippings, Lady Speed Stick, and rotten otter.

I didn't want to be greedy, so I just grabbed the one, a

poly-rayon number with a Tahitian dusk theme. Claude had a full-length mirror on the wall, as well as some expensive-looking video editing equipment, so this made my try-on a real breeze. To tell you the truth, the whole production really took me back to my freelance modeling days, before the State Troopers got involved and cordoned off the forest preserve.

I'd love to sit here and tell you that my first Hawaiian shirt fit like a glove but, on account of my hyperhidrosis, I've never been able to wear the God-blessed things and I don't want to speak out of turn. At the risk of sounding vain, however, let it suffice to say that my body looked positively flawless.

Claude of course took all the credit for the introduction, insisted that it was like getting Monsieur and Madame Curie together. When I eulogized him this past Labor Day, I assured both his ghost and the Courtyard by Marriott's second-shift maintenance crew that I'd never forget the same, that I'd live each day like it was my last Tri-County Ribfest and dress accordingly.

I also made it a point to apologize to his widow, Roslyn, for failing to properly cinch up my bathrobe and/or don the appropriate undergarments that one time, and prior to setting up my sprinkler.



I wear them when I visit my father at The Home. I do so in an effort to jog his memory, hoping my Hawaiian shirts will remind him that he once had a life, one that didn't involve puréed meals and guardrails in the shower.

A bloodborne pathogen attacked his brain approximately two years ago. The neurologists said it was analogous to malware wiping out his hard drive, if that made it easier to understand. I politely insisted that it didn't, that I don't own a Personal Computer and won't unless and until *Newsweek* insists they're an absolute necessity.

The last time I went, I made sure to wear an all-time favorite, emblazoned with the reds and oranges and yellows of sunrise. I even got it dry cleaned beforehand, but that was more for the benefit of one of the nurses, with whom I'd like to couple in my Buick.

It didn't pan out. The aides walked my father out to the Registration Desk to greet me and, after giving me a once-over, my father shook his head and flicked his wrist like he was sending back an undercooked veal parm.

"That's not him," he said. "My son wasn't a queer."

A lesser man, one with limited access to Hawaiian shirts, would've crumbled. I, on the other hand, didn't have to look any further than my own chest for a reminder that tomorrow is a new day, ripe with promise and fresh papaya.