

DOGE AND DUST BUNNIES



DILLON HAMILTON

Doge and Dust Bunnies

by Dillon Hamilton

Gil found the Echo Show a difficult tool to wield in the morning. Given his own grogginess, gameshows being blared from Helen Kinsey's room down the hall, and his tendency to salivate while flat on his back, the Echo Show was, on certain mornings, unusable. This was such a morning. The screen in front of him read ten-fifteen, indicating that John, Gil's paid caretaker, had forgotten him, yet again.

Gil swallowed hard and said, "Alexa, ask the Wall Street Journal for a news summary."

There was a great bit about politics, corporate vaccine distribution, the deaths of a few celebrities, and some pieces that Gil found below the category of miscellaneous. Then, came something rather surprising. A movement, or if you ask around Wall Street aftermarket, a mob, had targeted a few of their favorite stocks for a push and hold, as they called it, to the chant of, "Buy the dip!" Gil, a lover of a good chant, listened more intently to find that this movement or mob, depending on who you ask, used the odd vehicle of a common man's trading application to ram riotous through the front lobby of a few hedge funds just to say hello. Each day they targeted a new stock, but today, seeing as it was the weekend and the market was closed, they decided to go after an obscure thing, something about a Shiba and a coin, reminding Gil of the one word his nephew Zachary had told him to remember—Doge. The news summary concluded with a few remarks from a couple of Wall Street's version of dispensationalists. They were rather doom and gloom the whole way round.

"Alexa, play voicemails," Gil said.

"I didn't quite catch that," Alexa said.

Gil swallowed. "Alexa, play voicemails."

One unheard message played.

“Uncle G, it’s Zach. I’m following this coin push on social media and as of this morning, if my math is correct, you should have around twenty thousand dollars’ worth of Doge just sitting in your wallet. If you can remember where you have the black notebook with all of your login info, have your caretaker grab it for you and give me a call back. I can login for you and trade it but be as quick as you can. This could dive any minute.”

The message ended. Gil yawned and brought the back of his left hand to his face. He tried excavating the crud from the corners of his eyes but had a difficult time. John usually did that sort of thing. He would warm a rag in the sink, wring it, and gently wipe Gil’s face every morning. It wasn’t a cold splash, but it did make Gil feel much fresher. Since John’s probationary period had lifted as a caretaker, he could choose his own clients, and having cared for other’s with less demanding needs, he had begun to neglect his morning shifts at Gil’s. Gil had been hopeful for the boy and encouraged him to fulfill his duties as he had originally promised, but now John lay among the rest of the fodder that were the temporary caretakers to a MS patient. Gil assumed the smell of the government housing was no draw either, but now that John was forced to wear a mask that shouldn’t have been a problem.

What Gil found most ironic was the proximity to the black notebook of his person at that very moment. With his bed being very near to the built-in shelves on his left, Gil could have rubbed the notebook with his knee, if he had had anymore control down there. He grabbed the stick from his lap that he used to poke the buttons on the stereo and began to poke at the notebook, coming within a hair’s breadth multiple times, then thought better of it. He said, “Alexa, call John.”

The line rang and ended without giving him the option of leaving a voicemail. Then he said, “Alexa, call C.J.”

The line went straight to voicemail. Gil left him one and then remembered C.J. was supposed to be in important meetings all day.

“Alexa, call Matty,” he said.

The line rang and his sister Matilda answered on the fifth ring. “Gilbert! Is that you? I told you yesterday that I’d be there around one or two o’clock,” she said.

“I know, Sis, but I need you to come a little earlier. It’s a matter of importance.”

“My crowns are important, too, Gil. I cannot change the appointment now. I’ll see you between one and two, okay?”

“Okay. Hurry, if you can, please.”

“Bye, Gil.”

“Bye, Sis.”

Gil drew his stick and went to work. He nudged the corner of the black notebook little-by-little, planning to push it off the shelf and onto his bed. Once that had been accomplished, he had planned to pull his covers up using his teeth and left hand. He did not account for how tired the nudging of the notebook would make him. He rested for a moment gathering his breath and thought he might need motivation to continue.

“Alexa, play big band music,” he said. Glenn Miller’s *In the Mood* spilled on to the table above his chest and poured over him.

“Wrong kind of motivation but okay,” he said and went on with his prodding.

“Turn it down, Gil,” Helen Kinsey yelled from down the hall.

Gil cleared his throat. “Helen. Helen, could you get someone from the lobby or the front office to help me out?”

“They’re on lunch. Won’t be back until one-thirtyish,” she replied.

“Helen, please!”

There was no reply.

“Alexa, lower volume.”

Alexa obliged. Gil was sweating and panting, when he could finally hear himself think again, but he wasn’t sure which had come first—the sweating or the panting. By default, he assumed it was the sweating. It wasn’t a warm January, by any stretch of the imagination, but his room’s thermostat was set at a sultry eighty-five degrees. He rested from his yelling but could not be kept from his prodding long and made quick work of the remaining distance the notebook had to travel.

When the notebook reached its tipping point, Gil had planned to give it a good flick, assuring it landed near his lap. He prepared with a quick breather, set the stick where he wanted it, and flicked. His control not being what it used to, the initial thrust and direction appeared to be measured properly, but he had forgotten that much of his daily bread had been spent on the prodding and poking. His stick clipped the notebook enough to knock it from its perch and into the floor.

“Rats,” he said and yelled, “Helen!” He yelled for her until he lost his breath. Even though she likely heard him, she could not do much for him. She was bed-ridden and had no telephone. So, he shut his eyes and waited for anyone to show up.

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Matilda entered Gil's room smoldering and expecting to be set ablaze. She expected an apology from him for shaming her into leaving her appointment and rescheduling at the dentist's earliest opening, which was in four months' time. She also expected to find Gil in his chair and at his desk. The chair was off to the side, looking as if Gil had just left it for bed. She heard him snoring before she saw him.

"Damn you, John," she said.

He was partially untucked. Matty walked to him and felt his forehead.

"You must've gotten hot, but now you're freezing," she whispered.

She tucked him in thoroughly and set about her daily routine of laundry, cooking him lunch, and preparing a dinner that John could microwave at the nightshift. She finished this routine and remembered a couple of dust bunnies that had looked at her the wrong way a couple days prior. She grabbed a broom and hustled between his desk and the kitchen. She was especially thorough in the places where crumbs may congregate. Mice were rumored to have invaded last winter. Matty knew it was the fault of the twenty-something year-old that lived down the hall, but she would make sure Gil could never be accused of attracting rodents to his room. When she had finished with his desk and the kitchen, she set her sights on the floor around and beneath Gil's bed. And again, she was nothing, if not thorough. She swept out a pile of those cross-looking dust bunnies and then tipped her top half over to check the area closest to the wall. Gil dropped cassettes and books back there from time to time. She had even found a bottle of skin ointment once, but the solitary item that teetered on its corners between the wall and the floor was a black notebook.

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C. J. called Gil from the door, which was perpetually cracked, but no one answered. He pushed the door three-quarters open and called, again. And again, no answer, but this time there was a muffled snore. C. J. stepped through. He found Gil exactly where Matty had left him, tucked and tuckered out. C. J. walked to his side and pressed the mattress close to Gil's shoulder.

"Gilbert," he said.

Gil stirred, but failed to wake.

C. J. smiled, pleased that Gil was healthy and sleeping peacefully. The voicemail that Gil had left him had troubled him greatly. So, greatly that he didn't stop at his home to change out of his suit.

"Alexa, play *You Really Got Me* by Van Halen," C. J. said.

Gil woke and choked for a bit before saying, "That David Lee Roth had a weird taste in chest hair grooming techniques."

"Hmmm. Is that all that was wrong with him?" C. J. asked. "What was so urgent earlier, Gil? I rushed over."

"What time is it?" Gil asked.

"Three."

"Quick! Look under my bed."

"What? Why?" C. J. asked, not wanting to get closer to the floor than he had to in his suit.

"My notebook fell."

C. J. looked. "Nothing's back there," he said.

"Check again! It only fell back there a few hours ago."

C. J. checked. "Nothing, again. Could it be somewhere else?"

“No, it just fell. What time did you say?”

“Three.”

“Oh, Sis has probably been here. See if there is a microwaveable meal next to the sink,”

Gil begged.

Tired from his boss’s chiding and nipping at his heels, C. J. readily obliged to do as his friend asked, but not so cheerily as he might otherwise.

“Looks like Salisbury steak and mashed potatoes for you,” C. J. said from the kitchen.

Gil shook his head, panicked. “Do the trash cans look as if they’ve been emptied?”

“Yes.”

“Alexa—” Gil gargled and coughed. “Alexa, call Sis. Call Matty!”

“What’s the matter, Gil?” C. J. asked.

The line rang and Matty picked up. “Gil, I’ve just been over there. Don’t you call me back over now!”

“What did you do with it, Sis?”

Matty scoffed. “With what?”

“The notebook. It was under the bed and I know you tidied up while I slept.”

“Well, it went to the dumpster with the rest of the rubbish. You won’t have any mice pittering or pattering around your room. Don’t you worry about that.”

Gil stilled and his voice quavered when he said, “Gotta go, Sis. Hang up, Alexa.” Alexa did as she was told.

“Gil, what’s wrong? How can I help?” C. J. asked.

“The city waste trucks came around two, today. No one can help. Thought I might get a new chair and pay you a little for all your help.”

C. J. laid a serious hand on Gil's shoulder. "I'd never have taken it anyway. Though, I may need it if these individual investors keep pumping stocks and cryptocurrencies. I could be out of a job."

Gil blubbered a bit and said, "I'll take my Salisbury and potatoes now."