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GLENN SLADE CLARK JR

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GLENN SLADE CLARK JR

**CLARK
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2021

And Then an Elephant Shot Out of His Chest

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First Edition: February 2015

PDF E-Book Edition: September 2021

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Some typographical errors from previous publications have been corrected for this edition.

Cover art by Ken Morgan.

“WELCOME TO CREATIVE WRITING 106,” SAID THE professor, as he entered the classroom. “I am Professor Frosty-butterpillow-protagonistic-showerhead-flowerpot-dog-eating-fryingpan-massglorious, but I insist that you all call me Professor Frosty-butterpillow-protagonistic-showerhead-flowerpot-dog-eating-fryingpan-massglorious-condensed, for short, as a sign of familiarity throughout the entire duration of this course.”

The students, who didn't know whether to laugh out loud or run screaming to the registrar to drop the absurd professor's class, simply stared wide-eyed, as the strange-looking man made his way to the front of the room. He had an elegant stride, with long, exceedingly skinny slacks, and he wore a navy-blue sports coat over his decidedly pear-shaped body. His head was both entirely bald and graced with a full shock of shining red hair, and it always had been. His arms and legs were so thin that anyone who observed them was forced to wonder if there was even room enough for bones beneath the skin of them. His legs resembled chopsticks that were stuck into the bottom of his basket-ball-esque belly, and they were held to the floor by his extraordinarily tiny feet and, remarkably, even tinier shiny black shoes.

The Professor, as we shall refer to him henceforth, for the sake of the conservation of both paper and of ink, looked over his mouth-breathing new students and scoffed without reason or purpose. He addressed them with an air of undeniable wisdom, in spite of his peculiar manifestation. "Today's lesson is the first and most important lesson in Creative Writing. Before we can go any further in the course, we must establish the rules. Can anyone tell me the rules of creative writing offhand, without the benefit of having been correctly educated by my vast doctoral knowledge and unequivocal experience?"

A young man raised his hand, quite certain of himself.

“Yes, you there, Mr. ...?”

“Billy, sir.”

“Yes, Billy, please do enlighten us on the rules of creative writing.”

“Well, Professor Pennywindsor ... procomp ... sogna-thus ... uh ...”

“If you’re going to mangle my name, Billy, please refrain from using it.”

“Gladly, Professor. Anyway, there are rules, like uh ... grammar ... punctuation, never start a sentence with the word ‘and,’ and have a good vocabulary. Um ... keep your facts straight, and, uh ... never rip anybody else off.”

“Well, Billy, it seems you’re an idiot and something of a tit,” spake the professor haughtily. “You see, the only hard and fast rule of creativity in writing is that there is no hard and fast rule for writing creatively. There are no rules for creative writing. Artistry is nothing at all if not the greatest scofflaw of all vocations. No rules. None. What an incredible tit you are!”

“You can’t call me a ... You can’t call me that, sir! I’ll complain to the dean!”

“Yes, Billy, I can. I can call you whatever I like, because there are no *rules* to creative writing, and this class is *called* Creative Writing, and *therefore*, there are no *rules* to this class.

Now, listen closely, as I debunk your titly notions of the rules. What was the first one again?”

Billy shrugged, “Idunno.”

A young lady, who had been taking feverish notes, shouted out, “Grammar.”

“Ain’t no thing,” answered the professor. “Next?”

The girl blurted out, “Punctuation!”

“You mean like ending all questions with a question mark, don’t you! Or perhaps you mean never ending sentences of narration with an exclamation mark.” He considered that, astonished! “These are rules for writing in general, yes, but the rules of writing were made to be broken, especially when we are poised to confront them artistically. We are not here to write business letters or technical manuals. We are here to write thoughtful, perhaps even dream-like essays, short fiction, even ten-thousand-page novels. And I would never begin a sentence with ‘and’ in this class, unless I wanted to, or saw fit for some reason, or no reason at all, to do so. This is true.

“As for continuity,” he scratched his head, running his fingers determinedly through his wispy gray hair, until the itch had passed. “I should think that makes perfect sense, but is it a rule? Hardly! There might be a crisis, a *Crisis on Infinite Earths!* The multiverse could collide with itself, the

story may *require* an incongruous fact, or three-thousand incongruous facts, before it even *begins* to make sense.”

Billy raised his hand again, and the Professor pointed to him encouragingly. “Um, I have to ask, didn’t your hair used to be red?”

“What!” asked the Professor. “Of course not. My hair has always been gray.”

“Then why do I remember you walking in here with red hair ... and completely bald?” Billy shook his head. “I’m so confused. This class sucks.”

“Well, Billy my boy, it’s because you’re a tit. That, or there’s some epic temporal disturbance in this room. Time travel! That’s it!” The professor laughed out loud with sheer delight. “In creative writing, we don’t even have to move through time chronologically. It’s a wonder, really. A limitless wonder, where all things *are* things, and even *nothings* are things, and all things and nothings alike that *could* be done *can* be done. Do you see what I mean? No rules at all, my young friend. No rules of any kind.”

“Well, speaking of *speaking*,” Billy pressed on, “what about vocabulary? Doesn’t one need to have a vast vocabulary, before one can even begin to write?”

“No,” said the Professor.

“Oh,” said Billy.

“Forgive my invidious statement, Sir Tit, but I daresay, at times, flaunting one’s myriad collection of little-known words may even hinder the comprehension of one’s work. But, before you remonstrate, if indeed a healthy dash of elevated loquaciousness is what your work requires, then by all means, don’t hold back. And may I point out that while you yourself have an obtuse yet salubrious countenance, your friend there taking feverish notes looks inexorably scorbutic!”

“Huh?” Billy asked.

“Precisely, Billy. Write what you *can*. Then write what you *will*. When writing creatively, use only the words that you really like best. Use them to do whatever you like. Anything can happen. Anything at all. You could even write an elephant shooting out of your chest!”

“But that’s absurd!”

“And so it is. There’s no rule against absurdity, just as there’s no rule against sensibility. Haven’t I made it clear that the only true law is naught?” The Professor pulled his elegant, long, blond locks behind him, tying them into a tail.

“Your hair’s blond now!” noted Billy, with confused surprise.

“As ever it’s been!” Proclaimed the Professor.

Billy blinked twice, then decided, in pretense, not to be troubled. He asked his next question, “But what about all of the things that have already been done? Isn’t there a rule against stealing ideas?”

“A copyright is the only real inhibitor here,” the Professor solemnly professed, “but that’s only a law, not nearly a *rule*. By all means, write down your visions of *Harry Potter vs. the Vampire Lestat*. Write a screenplay of your dreams for *Star Wars, Episode CXII*. Share them with your mom and all of your friends! Just don’t publish them, and don’t submit them for sale. I’m not here to teach you about publishing though, just writing, and writing freely, without inhibitions, like a naked baby flying through a bakery!

“Now, as for stealing ideas, it’s *all* been done before, one way or another. Make your own remix. Add your own spin. Why call it stealing, when you can mark it *homage*?”

“But surely there are things you simply *can’t* do!” insisted young Billy. “What about common sense and decency! What about taste? What about formula and the staples of genre?”

“Billy, you vex me! Now let me spell it out! Taste and decency are really singular perspectives. Why must we all pretend to share a common definition of these things, simply because we’ve been told that we should? Will the world really fall apart, if we break with convention? Will socie-

ty crumble; will the oceans boil, if we walk backwards into a room and sit at the desk on our hands and our heads? I tell you, in writing creatively, there is absolutely nothing we can't do! For example!"

The Professor suddenly stripped off his clothes and stood stark naked before the class. He turned, running a hand over his stringy black hair, and went to the board, where he wrote an elaborate equation that ended with " $=N$."

He stood back and looked at his handiwork, oblivious to the screeches and gasps from the class now facing his unencumbered posterior. "By golly, my young 'Tit! That's it! Time travel indeed!" The professor launched himself into the air and flew with a wicked smile, his aged, yet child-like genitals offending many of the students who beheld them, as he flew through the air to the other side of the room, where he descended merrily into a giant bowl full of dough and traveled back in time, to a time before his birth.

The students sat stunned, staring at the bowl and waiting for his return. When, after a time, it was clear that he was not coming back anytime soon, Billy asked the girl, who'd been taking feverish notes, "Do you think the class is over? What should we do? Do you think we'll lose our grade if we get up and leave ... if he comes back at all?"

AND THEN AN ELEPHANT SHOT OUT OF HIS CHEST

The girl shrugged, then put her feverish head down on her desk and died silently, unmourned by anyone and forgotten by everyone.

Billy turned to his other classmates. “Should we leave? I didn’t learn a thing in this class! I say we go to the dean.”

And then an elephant shot out of his chest.

The students all screamed and ran from the room, as the elephant trumpeted and began writing chocolate love sonnets on the board with its trunk. As they fled the room, they all knew they were safe, because the class, Creative Writing, had at last been dismissed. They all now knew that *anything* could happen in Creative Writing, and it probably would. An elephant had actually shot out of Billy’s scrawny little chest, and he had remained alive and perfectly unharmed, to tell the tale to any who might acquiesce to hear it.

There were indeed *no* rules in Creative Writing, and the students of the Professor had learned the lesson well. All except for Billy, that is. When it is revealed that the rules are illusory, some people break free, and others just sit. Billy was simply too much of a tit.

About the Author

Glenn Slade Clark, Jr. is the author of eleven books, including the novel *Cry, Wolf: Shadow of the Werewolf*, the short fiction anthology *The Great Debate*, the Gothic horror series *The Chronicles of Nightfire, Texas*, and two fantasy series: *Metrognomes* and *The Legends of Nod*. He lives in Dallas, Texas, where he is currently hard at work on his next book.

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