

The Dumbass Partners

by

David Lubar

“What fresh hell of another nice mess have I got myself into?” Dimitri Malascribe said, staring at the 21” CRT monitor that dominated the available real estate on his nightstand.

“You’re mixing quotes again,” his wife, Olivia, said, not looking up from her Nook, where she had just reached the 97% mark in *100 Much Much Darker Shades of Gray*. “Dorothy Parker and Oliver Hardy were talking about totally different things.”

“It’s called a ‘mash up,’” Dimitri said. “I was being current in my lingo.”

“Right. As always. So, what is the mess?” she asked.

“My agent got me a deal to write a short story for *Forbes*.”

“*Forbes*? Fiction?”

“Yes, *Forbes*. They’ve decided to expand their demographic, and try to capture some of the *New Yorker*’s readers.” Dimitri said.

Olivia pulled her left hand from beneath the covers, swiped to the next page on her Nook, then slipped her hand back where it had been. “What’s wrong with that? If it’s for the *New Yorker*’s audience, you don’t even need a plot.”

“The story is due tomorrow morning,” Dimitri said. “My agent forgot to tell me about it until now. And I have to use their title. It’s going to appear in a special issue on good and bad partnerships.” He tapped briefly at the keyboard on his lap,

then looked over at the monitor, which was attached to a desktop or, technically, a floortop, computer by the side of his bed.

“Your agent is a moron and a crook,” Olivia said. “He’s ripping you off with his commissions.”

“All the best agents charge 50% commission. He’s worth it. The lawyer he sent me to told me so,” Dimitri poked at several more keys.

“That lawyer skims another 20%,” Olivia said. “On top of which, I’ve never heard of an agent who asks you to pay him an advance against expected future commissions.”

“That’s called ‘Pay It Before Ward.’ It’s a movement he started to help writers manage their cash flow.” Dimitri said. “All of this is necessary. I’m investing in my career.”

“I wish you’d invest in a laptop,” Olivia said. “Or a tablet. It drives me crazy watching you lug that computer up the stairs every evening.”

“Those devices are just props for posers and wannabes who scribble bad novels in coffee shops. Real writers need real keyboards,” Dimitri said.

“Dumas probably used a quill,” Olivia said. “Kipling used a pen. Lots of writers used typewriters. It doesn’t matter how you write. It matters what you write. Speaking of which, what’s the title they stuck you with?”

“This is stifling. ‘The Dumbass Partners,’” Dimitri said. “What kind of a sadistic monster would stick a person with an impossible title like that? A title is supposed to inspire creativity, not throttle it.” He gazed down at the keyboard, as if all the answer to all his problems lay encoded in the molded black squares. A moment later, his head snapped toward his wife. “Brilliant! You gave me an idea.” He leaned over and kissed her on the cheek.

“That’s nice.” She resumed reading her novel, hit 100%, turned off her tablet, rolled over, and went to sleep.

An hour later, Dimitri nudged Olivia on the shoulder.

“Wha...?” she said, opening one eye.

“Read this. I think it’s good, so far.”

“Can’t it wait?” she asked.

“No. I’m stuck on where to go from here.”

Olivia sat up, took the sheet of printed paper, and started reading.”

“The Dumbass Partners”

By

Dimitri Malascribe

“I’ve got it,” my older brother, Maynard, shouted loudly, waving the open book in my face at the page it was open to.

“Got what? Herpes?” I joked, kiddingly.

“An idea,” Maynard said, explainingly. He doesn’t get sarcasm. He’s stupid. I have all the brains.

“What’s your idea,” I asked, inquisitively. I ventured a peering glance at the book. It was called *How to Get Super Rich Like Lots of Famous People Did and You Can, Too*. I think Maynard bought it from a TV shopping show.

“There was this guy who wrote like 300 books. Here’s the thing -- he didn’t write all of them himself. He gave people the idea, and they wrote them. But he used his name. He made tons of money and got real famous.”

"What guy?" I asked, questioningly.

"Alexander Dumbass," he said, mispronouncingly, jabbing a finger at the book.

"Dumas," I said, correctingly.

"Do Ma do what?" Maynard asked, confusedly.

"Do you see where I'm going with this?" Dimitri asked after Olivia handed the sheet of paper back to him. "It's pretty sophisticated, so far."

Olivia shifted her gaze to her bedside clock. "That took you an hour?"

"I craft my every word," Dimitri said. "It is crucial for rhythm and context to know when a character is asking inquisitively and when he is asking inquiringly. I don't expect you to understand these things. But they are important. I've spent years learning my craft."

"Do you think *Forbes* readers will enjoy a herpes jokes?" Olivia asked.

"Come on, that's hilarious. But I'm stuck after the 'Do Ma' part."

"Maybe you should think about a new career," Olivia said. "Your first and only novel came out fifteen years ago. It sold five copies, not counting the hundred we bought, and was partially to blame for the bankruptcy of your publisher."

"It's not my fault the world wasn't ready for a novel about giant mutant stink bugs," Dimitri said. "Besides, *Stinkbug Forest* wasn't my only book. I've published sixteen novels since then."

"On Create Space," Olivia said. "That doesn't count. You haven't even made back what you spent for cover art. And you managed to get us sued."

"I never would have guessed DC Comics lacks a sense of humor," Dimitri said. "You have to admit, *Bat Girl's Day Off* was a great idea for a novel. I should think about licensing a character. I wonder what that would cost?"

"You should think about getting a job," Olivia said. "I'm tired of being the

only employed person in this marriage.”

“It takes time to build a career,” Dimitri said. “This story could help me reach a huge new audience. I need to figure out how to finish it.”

“Good God,” Olivia muttered. “Just write anything. It’s not like people will read it. Especially not with that ridiculous title. *Forbes* readers probably don’t give a damn about fiction.”

Dimitri stared at her. His eyes widened.

“What?” she asked.

“You gave me a better idea!” He started typing. “This is brilliant!”

Olivia gave up on the idea of getting right back to sleep. She grabbed her Nook and started her next book, *My Wicked Strong Demon Lover*. Her free hand crept back beneath the blankets.

After another hour of furious typing, broken by long pauses, sighs, and far too much muttering from Dimitri, and an occasional soft moan from Olivia, Dimitri ran downstairs to the printer, and returned with another page.

“Stuck, again?” Olivia asked. A fast reader, she’d already moved on to her next novel, *With or Within You*.

“Sort of. But I love what I have to far. It’s brilliant. Maybe my best opening, ever. Take a look. See if it gives you any ideas.”

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Dimitri Malascribe

“Well, that’s 152,294 for me, and 0 for you,” God said, boastingly, as the man he’d systematically destroyed and demoralized over an entire month dropped

to his knees to pray devoutly for divine help.”

“Oh, shit,” Satan ejaculated, scatalogically. “I’ll get you next time, for sure.”

“You’re never going to win,” God said, assertively. “You should have quit the first time, right after Job. I gave him freakin’ boils, and he still loved me. No surprise. I’m lovable. And, in case you forgot, I know what will happen.”

“Yeah. Right. All powerful, all knowing, yadda, yadda. I’ve been hearing it for millennia. Give it a rest,” Satan said, frustratedly. He peered gloomily downward with his eyes. But then, like the Lucifer he’d once been, he brightened, glowingly. “Hey, Yawnweh, I’ve got an idea. We’re like always fighting and going head to head about stuff.”

“Head to horns,” God said, pointedly.

“Whatever. But, what about -- and this is just a wild idea that hit me -- but, what if we teamed up? You know - became partners? What do you think? We’d be so bad ass.”

“You mean dumb ass,” God said, correctingly.

Olivia finished reading. Dimitri waited for her response. After an eternity, she said, “I have no idea where you are going with this.”

“Neither do I,” Dimitri admitted. “Maybe God should say something eschatologically. But I’m not sure what that means. You’re my muse. My inspiration. My great supporter. Help me out. What do you think should happen?”

A first ray of the dawn sun broke through the window and splashed against the bedspread. Olivia switched off her Nook, withdrew her hand from under the blanket, and got out of bed. “I have an idea,” she said.

“Great,” Dimitri said. “For this story, or for something else.”

“Something else,” Olivia said. “Something bold and wonderful.” She went downstairs, and returned a moment later with a suitcase.

As she started filling the suitcase with Dimitri’s clothes, he asked, “What are you doing?”

“Ending a dumbass partnership,” she said.

“I don’t get it,” Dimitri said.

“Exactly,” Olivia said, handing him the suitcase. “and you never will. Now get your dumb ass out of here. I have a book to get back to.”