

Unnatural Behavior

By

Mark Bowen

"We're not the top species on the planet because we're nice. We are a very aggressive species; it is in us. People talk a lot about how well the military turns kids into killing machines, and I'll always argue that it's just finishing school"

Karl Marlantes, USMC

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1566 Pine Ave. # 205A  
Long Beach, CA 90813

(562) 335-6024

co97bruin@gmail.com

Cast of Characters

Travis: A Soldier with PTSD; 25-40

Jeremy: A Journalist and Anti-war  
activist; 25-40

Scene

A Park Bench, overlooking a duck pond.

UNNATURAL BEHAVIOR

(JEREMY sits alone on the Park Bench as TRAVIS approaches, in uniform. In the background, we hear an ice cream truck playing its version of Beethoven's "Ode To Joy")

Hey. TRAVIS

Hey. JEREMY

You came. TRAVIS

Yeah. JEREMY

You found the place. TRAVIS

The note you left me said- JEREMY

It didn't specify- TRAVIS

You knew that she'd know the place you meant. JEREMY

Yeah. TRAVIS

And I knew. JEREMY

Yeah. TRAVIS

(pause)  
This seat taken?

What are you talking about? Of course... I'm sorry. JEREMY

Don't be. TRAVIS

(uncomfortable silence)

Won't you...? JEREMY

What? TRAVIS

Have a seat. JEREMY

Yeah, sure. TRAVIS  
(He sits)  
What do they call this?

Call what? JEREMY

This tune. TRAVIS

It's just the ice cream truck. JEREMY

Yeah, I know, but it's something famous. TRAVIS

Yeah, but with the way they butcher it... JEREMY

I know but it's still- What do they call it? It was one of Beethoven's... TRAVIS

Oh my god... JEREMY

What do you mean, "oh my god"? TRAVIS

Nothing, I was just surprised that... JEREMY

What? TRAVIS

Never mind. JEREMY

Say it. TRAVIS

JEREMY

It's nothing, I'm sorry.

TRAVIS

Just say it. You can't believe that's the kinda thing "The Beast" would know-

JEREMY

Yeah, okay that's... I'm sorry.

TRAVIS

That all you know how to say?

JEREMY

What do you want me to say?

TRAVIS

I told you.

(pause)

What are you so afraid of?

JEREMY

What do you think?

TRAVIS

Yeah, of course.... don't be.

JEREMY

You mean you're not...?

TRAVIS

What?

JEREMY

You're not here to...

(stops himself: the unspoken words are  
"kill me")

... you know?

TRAVIS

No.

JEREMY

(takes a deep breath)

The "Ode to Joy"...

TRAVIS

Yeah, that's it...

JEREMY

From the-

TRAVIS  
- 9th Symphony, I know.

JEREMY  
Yes.

TRAVIS  
One of his last, right?

JEREMY  
Yes. They say that by the time he wrote this, which was arguably his ultimate masterpiece, the deafness had become complete.

TRAVIS  
Cut the legs off of the piano, put his ear to the floor so he could "hear" the music from the vibrations... impressed?

JEREMY  
You really didn't come here to-

TRAVIS  
No.

(long uncomfortable silence)

JEREMY  
We missed you again in court this morning.

TRAVIS  
Yeah.

JEREMY  
The judge had a message for you. If you would just turn yourself in-

TRAVIS  
Looks like the ducks here have a message for both of us.

JEREMY  
What?

TRAVIS  
"Please be aware, that we eat aquatic plants and insects. Feeding us can cause overpopulation, water pollution, and unnatural behavior."

JEREMY  
What are you talking about?

TRAVIS  
(indicating the sign)

Up there.

JEREMY

Oh.

TRAVIS  
Yeah. That sign wasn't there when you came here as a kid,  
was it?

JEREMY

How'd you know-

TRAVIS

It wasn't was it?

JEREMY

No.

TRAVIS

Bastards.

JEREMY

I think it's something to do with the desire to protect the  
wildlife. They say that we shouldn't-

(Travis has unzipped his backpack and  
pulled out a box of cereal. He stands  
and begins throwing handfuls into the  
pond in a frenzy)

TRAVIS

Bastards!! Look at me, look at me!! You gonna arrest  
me! Whats the matter, not the diet that nature intended for  
you? Eat it! Eat it you little... Yeah, there you go!

JEREMY

Alright, now just calm down...

TRAVIS

Don't touch me.

JEREMY

Come on, you need to-

TRAVIS

I said, don't touch me!!

JEREMY

Okay, okay.... I'm sorry. Let's just... Did you used to do  
this with her?

Huh?

TRAVIS

JEREMY

Feeding the ducks. Is that something the two of you used to do when you...? I'm sorry.

TRAVIS

I said stop doing that.

JEREMY

Doing what?

TRAVIS

You got nothing to be sorry for.

JEREMY

Maybe if you could just tell me...

TRAVIS

My grandmother.

JEREMY

I don't understand. Your...

TRAVIS

Used to take me to this very spot. But that was a long time before my "spiritual death".

JEREMY

Look, that's really not-

TRAVIS

That is what you called it, isn't it?

JEREMY

I was referring to-

TRAVIS

Did you bring it with you?

JEREMY

Yeah.

TRAVIS

Let me see.

JEREMY

Look, what's done is done. Whatever you wanted to say, let's just-

TRAVIS

Give it to me!

(He takes the newspaper from him and reads, pacing and smirking)

JEREMY

Funny?

TRAVIS

"Those who are spiritually dead can't possibly be trusted with the responsibility of ensuring the happiness of another human being in a loving relationship. And those who can never claim to have rightfully possessed something, can't legitimately claim to have had it stolen from them..."

JEREMY

You have to understand that when I wrote that I was just protecting myself. They had just found out about me and Alice, and some of the readers were calling on them to let me go. I thought it was important that I...

TRAVIS

(overlapping)

You were right.

JEREMY

(continuous, overlapping)

... explain to the world the reasons why she would... what?

TRAVIS

You were right. There's nothing inside me that's been alive for some time now.

JEREMY

Ever since the occupation of-

TRAVIS

No, long before that. But I'm sure that's what you want to hear. I'll tell you everything I remember... if you really want to know.

JEREMY

Alright...

TRAVIS

Good.

JEREMY

So... is it true? What your lawyer says?

TRAVIS

Yes. Well, yes and no. It all started when we pursued the kid with the rocket launcher into the first house. And then we... You're not writing it.

JEREMY

What?

TRAVIS

You're not writing it down.

JEREMY

You don't want me printing this.

TRAVIS

Every word of it. But if you're gonna tell the world the true story about "The Beast", you go right to the source.

JEREMY

Okay...

TRAVIS

Good.

JEREMY

You know, I wasn't the the one who came up with that name in the first place, don't you?

TRAVIS

Yeah... So, my squad followed him into the house. When we got inside we couldn't find him. The lady said he wasn't there. Said her son was a "good boy", started telling us all about it. And then I saw the flag up on the wall. The same flag that...

(starts to lose control, but then  
collects himself)

Forty-five minutes later we were leaving the town. Every house was on fire, and the heads of the inhabitants were fixed on pikes on the outside.

JEREMY

You gave the order to cut off the heads?

TRAVIS

That's what the corporal said.

JEREMY

You raped the woman in the first house?

TRAVIS

That's what the rest of the evidence says.

JEREMY

I'm asking you.

TRAVIS

And I'm telling you. I said I'd tell you everything I remember. And so I've told you what I saw when we entered, what I saw when we left, and every detail of what I remember that came in between. Got it?

(Jeremy nods)

Good.

(long pause)

So tell me about the recruiting center.

JEREMY

Look, do we really have to do this?

TRAVIS

Yes.

JEREMY

What do you want to know?

TRAVIS

How did she look?

JEREMY

Look, I was just there to cover the story.

TRAVIS

Yeah.

JEREMY

I'd never seen her before that, I swear.

TRAVIS

Don't do that!

JEREMY

I hadn't.

TRAVIS

I know.

JEREMY

An entire recruitment center had just been shut down by a lone activist. It was newsworthy, so yeah I was there.

TRAVIS

How did she look to you?

JEREMY

I actually couldn't see her very well... it was windy, and her long blond hair was blowing right in her face. She couldn't do anything about it with her hands restrained where she'd chained herself to the front gate.

TRAVIS

And then?

JEREMY

And then, that was it. I didn't see her again for a couple days. I went over to the- to your house to interview her.

TRAVIS

And that was when-

JEREMY

No! Look, she made it very clear. Everything she'd done up until that point was because she wanted you home. That's all she was... nothing happened then.

TRAVIS

You're lying.

JEREMY

I swear to God. We didn't-

TRAVIS

I know you didn't. But something happened.

JEREMY

Yes.

(pause)

I said something during the interview that made her laugh. And when I heard what it sounded like I... I thought it was just the cutest thing I'd ever heard. I didn't think she saw it in my face, what I thought about it, but she did. We both smiled. I reached across the table to take her hand, and she instinctively pulled it away. I apologized, but she looked away, embarrassed. I asked what was wrong, and she looked back, our eyes met again and she said...

TRAVIS

What did she say?

JEREMY

She said... "If only I wasn't a married woman"

(long pause)

TRAVIS  
You said something to make her laugh?

JEREMY  
Yes.

TRAVIS  
What did you say?

JEREMY  
Please don't do this.

TRAVIS  
What did you say?

JEREMY  
I don't remember, I just-

TRAVIS  
(pulls a pistol and points it at him)  
What did you say? What did you say?!

JEREMY  
You said you weren't gonna-

TRAVIS  
I'm not.  
(lowers the gun)  
Just tell me.

JEREMY  
Look, I really don't remember, okay? I'm sorry I can't re-create the whole thing for you, or show you what the laugh sounded like, but-

TRAVIS  
(sets the gun down on the bench)  
You don't have to.

JEREMY  
What?

TRAVIS  
(closes his eyes)  
You don't have to demonstrate. I can hear it now. I haven't heard it for years. But now I can... thank you.

JEREMY  
You don't have to say that.

TRAVIS  
Yes. I do.  
(he walks toward the pond and kneels)  
(MORE)

TRAVIS (cont'd)  
She just "wanted me home"...

JEREMY  
Yes.

TRAVIS  
I think we both know she wasn't worried about me, she was worried about... them.

JEREMY  
Them?

TRAVIS  
Anybody else I might get my hands on. Me or anybody else on my side.

JEREMY  
Maybe after you'd come home the first or second time, yes. But at first...

TRAVIS  
Of course. Back when I was still the guy who could hear the laugh. Who wanted to hear it, wanted to really connect with her before...

(pause)  
Not "The Beast" who needs only to come home to his mate and fulfill his carnal desires by force.

JEREMY  
What do you mean?

TRAVIS  
You know what I mean.

JEREMY  
No!

TRAVIS  
Yes.

JEREMY  
She never told me that.

TRAVIS  
Why would she?

JEREMY  
She would have!

TRAVIS  
You're so sure?

JEREMY

You're lying.

TRAVIS

Maybe.

JEREMY

Maybe? You know that never happened.

TRAVIS

Why would I? It could have, and I wouldn't remember... right?

(he turns around to see Jeremy standing behind him and the gun still sitting on the bench where he placed it)

Ha! You didn't even pick it up.

JEREMY

Pick it... What, is that what all this was about? I was supposed to shoot you when you told me that?

TRAVIS

Maybe.

JEREMY

Prove some kind of point about... human nature?

TRAVIS

So what are you complaining about? You won, you proved otherwise.

JEREMY

I never considered it a competition.

TRAVIS

Sure.

JEREMY

You couldn't bring yourself to shoot me.

TRAVIS

I told you. That's not why I wanted to see you. You were right, I lost her a long time ago. But you...

(pause)

JEREMY

You know, if it'll make you feel any better, I'd pick it up and blow your head off right now if I believed you actually raped Alice.

TRAVIS  
I just told you that I did.

JEREMY  
But I know you didn't.

TRAVIS  
(snorts)  
I'm glad one of us is sure.

JEREMY  
Well, I am.

TRAVIS  
How do you know?

JEREMY  
Because I know how much you loved her.

(A long silence, and then:)

TRAVIS  
So where are they?

JEREMY  
Where are who?

TRAVIS  
You know who I'm talking about.

JEREMY  
No, I don't.

TRAVIS  
I gave my location. Obviously no one is gonna have to search for me anymore.

JEREMY  
You said to come alone.

TRAVIS  
I knew you wouldn't.

JEREMY  
You knew wrong.

TRAVIS  
You didn't show the note to the judge, or to...

JEREMY  
No.

TRAVIS  
Why not?

JEREMY  
Because this was between you and me.  
(pause)  
And because you don't need my intervention to put an end to  
all of this.  
(picks up the gun)  
You know what you've got to do.

TRAVIS  
Yeah, I do... leave the piece.

JEREMY  
That's not it.

TRAVIS  
Put it down.

JEREMY  
You don't need this to-

TRAVIS  
Put it down!

JEREMY  
No!

TRAVIS  
What, are you gonna shoot me after all?

JEREMY  
No, forget it.  
(sets it back down)  
I'm going. Just remember what I said.

TRAVIS  
I will.

JEREMY  
Good. And... I'm sorry for everything.

TRAVIS  
I told you to quit saying that.

JEREMY  
Alright. Take care of yourself.

(Jeremy exits)

TRAVIS

(slowly)

Thank you.

(He stares ahead into the pond for a moment, then goes back to get the gun. He comes back toward the pond as he places it in his backpack, then kneels again and smiles. For the first time, he appears totally at peace with himself. He goes back into the backpack and pulls out the box of cereal)

Hey there... Hey, little fellas! Come here!

(he kneels there, happily feeding the ducks as the lights fade)

END OF PLAY