



Make Something Up: Stories You Can't Unread

By Chuck Palahniuk

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Make Something Up: Stories You Can't Unread By Chuck Palahniuk

Stories you'll never forget—just try—from literature's favorite transgressive author

Representing work that spans several years, *Make Something Up* is a compilation of 21 stories and one novella (some previously published, some not) that will disturb and delight. In "Expedition," fans will be thrilled to find to see a side of Tyler Durden never seen before in a precursor story to *Fight Club*. And in other stories, the absurdity of both life and death are on full display; in "Zombies," the best and brightest of a high school prep school become tragically addicted to the latest drug craze: electric shocks from cardiac defibrillators. In "Knock, Knock," a son hopes to tell one last off-color joke to a father in his final moments, while in "Tunnel of Love," a massage therapist runs the curious practice of providing 'relief' to dying clients.

Funny, caustic, bizarre, poignant; these stories represent everything readers have come to love and expect from Chuck Palahniuk.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for Chuck Palahniuk and *Make Something Up*:

"Palahniuk doesn't write for tourists. He writes for hard-core devotees drawn to the wild, angry imagination on display and the taboo-busting humor."

—*The New York Times*

"Palahniuk is a bracingly toxic purveyor of dread and mounting horror. He makes nihilism fun."

—*Vanity Fair*

"Palahniuk displays a Swiftian gift for satire, as well as a knack for crafting mesmerizing sentences."

—San Francisco Examiner

"Few contemporary writers mix the outrageous and the hilarious with greater zest."

—*Newsday*

"Few authors have captured the pathologies of modern life quite like Palahniuk."

—Rocky Mountain News

"Chuck Palahniuk is one of the most intriguing writers of our time."

—*Tucson Citizen*

"For the first time, Palahniuk collects his short stories, which feature his signature humor, horror, and grit. [The] other stories deal with fire, bodily fluids, malfunctions, critiques of material society, bestiality, a bewitched tennis ball, and a murder at a Burning Man-type retreat. The collection is essential for Palahniuk fans and will likely win him some new ones."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"Palahniuk comes roaring back from a stretch of experimentalism with 23 tales celebrating his ongoing affection for the macabre... Pathos and panic and penitence from one of the darkest and most singular minds in contemporary American lit."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Even as you likely suffer debilitating motion sickness from the jarring emotional turns on every other page, you'll be inescapably restrained by an author who knows exactly what he's doing and has you right where he wants you. Palahniuk's uniquely modern style throws out any antiquated conventions that could keep him from destroying any expectations that keep you in complacent narrative comfort."

—*Booklist*

About the Author

CHUCK PALAHNIUK is the author of fourteen novels—*Beautiful You*, *Doomed*, *Damned*, *Tell-All*, *Pygmy*,

Snuff, Rant, Haunted, Diary, Lullaby, Choke, Invisible Monsters, Survivor, and Fight Club—which have sold more than five million copies altogether in the United States. He is also the author of *Fugitives and Refugees*, published as part of the Crown Journey Series, and the nonfiction collection *Stranger Than Fiction*. He lives in the Pacific Northwest. Visit him on the web at chuckpalahniuk.net.

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Knock-Knock

My old man, he makes everything into a Big Joke. What can I say? The old man loves to get a laugh. Growing up, half the time I didn't have a clue what his jokes were about, but I laughed anyways. Down at the barbershop, it didn't matter how many guys my father let take cuts ahead of him in line, he just wanted to sit there all Saturday and crack people up. Make folks bust a gut. Getting his hair cut was definitely a low priority.

He says, "Stop me if you've heard this one before .??.?" The way my old man tells it, he walks into the oncologist's office and he says, "After the chemotherapy, will I be able to play the violin?"

In response, the oncologist says, "It's metastasized. You've got six months to live .??.?"

And working his eyebrows like Groucho Marx, tapping the ash from an invisible cigar, my old man says, "Six months?" He says, "I want a second opinion."

So the oncologist, he says, "Okay, you've got cancer and your jokes stink."

So they do chemotherapy, and they give him some radiation like they do even if the shit burns him up so bad on the inside he tells me that taking a piss is like passing razor blades. He's still every Saturday down by the barbershop telling jokes even if now he's bald as a cue ball. I mean, he's skinny as a bald skeleton, and he's getting to haul around one of those cylinders of oxygen under pressure, like some little version of a ball-and-chain. He walks into the barbershop dragging that pressurized cylinder of oxygen with the tube of it going up and looping around his nose, over his ears, and around his bald head, and he says, "Just a little off the top, please." And folks laugh. Understand me: My old man is no Uncle Miltie. He's no Edgar Bergen. The man's skinny as a Halloween skeleton and bald and going to be dead by six weeks so it don't matter what he says, folks are going to hee-haw like donkeys just out of their genuine affection for him.

But, seriously, I'm not doing him justice. It's my fault if this doesn't come across, but my old man is funnier than he sounds. Maybe his sense of humor is a talent I didn't inherit. Back when I was his little Charlie McCarthy, the whole time growing up, he used to ask me, "Knock-knock?"

I'd say, "Who's there?"

He'd say, "Old Lady .??.?"

I'd say, "Old Lady, who?"

And he'd say, "Wow, I didn't know you could yodel!"

Me, I didn't get it. I was so stupid, I was seven years old and still stuck in the first grade. I didn't know Switzerland from Shinola, but I want for my old man to love me so I learned to laugh. Whatever he says, I laugh. By "Old Lady" my guess is he means my mom who ran away and left us. All's my old man will say

about her is how she was a “Real Looker” who just couldn’t take a joke. She just was NOT a Good Sport.

He used to ask me, “When that Vinnie van Gogh cut off his ear and sent it to the whore he was so crazy about, how’d he send it?”

The punch line is “He sent it by ‘ear mail,’?” but being seven years old, I was still stuck back on not knowing who van Gogh is or what’s a whore, and nothing kills a joke faster than asking my old man to explain himself. So when my old man says, “What do you get when you cross a pig with Count Dracula?” .??.?I knew to never ask, “What’s a ‘Count Dracula’?” I’d just get a big laugh ready for when he tells me, “A ‘Ham-pire’!”

And when he says, “Knock-knock .??.?”

And I say, “Who’s there?” And he says, “Radio.”

And I say, “Radio who?” And he’s ALREADY started to bust a gut when he says, “Radio not I’m going to cum in your mouth .??.?” Then—what the hell—I just keep laughing. My whole growing up I figure I’m just too ignorant to appreciate a good joke. Me, my teachers still haven’t covered long division and all the - multiple-cation tables so it’s not my old man’s fault I don’t know what’s “cum.”

My old lady, who abandoned us, he says she hated that joke so maybe I inherited her lack of humor. But love .??.?I mean you have to love your old man. I mean, after you’re born it’s not like you get a choice. Nobody wants to see their old man breathing out of some tank and going into the hospital to die sky-high on morphine and he’s not eating a bite of the red-flavored Jell-O they serve for dinner.

Stop me if I already told you this one: but my old man gets that prostrate cancer that’s not even like cancer because it takes twenty, thirty years before we even know he’s so sick, and the next thing I know is I’m trying to remember all the stuff he’s taught me. Like, if you spray some WD-40 on the shovel blade before you dig a hole the digging will go a lot easier. And he taught me how to squeeze a trigger instead of pulling it and wrecking my aim. He taught me to remove bloodstains. And he taught me jokes .??.?lots of jokes.

And, sure, he’s no Robin Williams, but I watched this movie one time about Robin Williams who gets dressed up with a red rubber ball on his nose and this big rainbow-colored afro wig and those big clown shoes with a fake carnation stuck in his buttonhole of his shirt that squirts water, and the guy’s a hotshot doctor who makes these little kids with cancer laugh so hard they stop dying. Understand me: These bald kid skeletons—who look worse off than my old man—they get HEALTHY, and that whole movie is based on a True Story.

What I mean is, we all know that Laughter is the Best Medicine. All that time being stuck in the hospital Waiting Room, even I read the Reader’s Digest. And we’ve all heard the true story about the guy with a brain cancer the size of a grapefruit inside his skull and he’s about to croak—all the doctors and priests and experts say he’s a goner—only he forces himself to watch nonstop movies about the Three Stooges. This Stage Four cancer guy forces himself to laugh nonstop at Abbott and Costello and Laurel and Hardy and those Marx brothers, and he gets healed by the end-orphans and oxy-generated blood.

So I figure, what’ve I got to lose? All I need to do is remember some of my old man’s favorite gags and get him started back laughing on the road to recovery. I figure, what could it hurt?

So this grown?up son walks into his father’s hospice room, pulls up a chair beside the bed, and sits down.

The son looks into his old man's pale, dying face and says: "So this blond gal walks into a neighborhood bar where she's never been before, and she's got tits out to HERE and a tight little heinie and she asks the bartender for a Michelob, and he serves her a Michelob, except he sneaks a Mickey Finn into her bottle and this blonde goes unconscious, and every guy in the bar leans her over the edge of the pool table and hikes up her skirt and fucks her, and at closing time they slap her awake and tell her she's got to leave. And every few days this gal with the tits and the ass walks in and asks for a Michelob and gets a Mickey Finn and gets fucked by the crowd until one day she walks in and asks the bartender, can he maybe give her a Budweiser instead?"

Granted—I have NOT landed this particular shaggy-dog story since I was in the first grade, but my old man used to love this next part .??.

The bartender smiles so nice and says, "What? You don't like Michelob no more?"

And this Real Looker, she leans over the bar, all confidential and she whispers, "Just between you and me .??.?" she whispers, "Michelob makes my pussy hurt .??.?"

The first time I learned that joke, when my old man taught it to me, I didn't know what was "pussy." I didn't know "Mickey Finn." I didn't know what folks meant when they talked about "fucking," but I knew all this talk made my old man laugh. And when he told me to stand up and tell that joke in the barbershop it made the barbers and every old man reading detective magazines laugh until half of them blew spit and snot and chewing tobacco out their noses.

Now the grown?up son tells his old dying father this joke, just the two of them alone in that hospital room, - late-late at night, and—guess what—his old man doesn't laugh. So the son tries another old favorite, he tells the joke about the Traveling Salesman who gets a phone call from some Farmer's Daughter he met on the road a couple months before, and she says, "Remember me? We had some laughs, and I was a good sport?" and the man says, "How're you doing?" and she says, "I'm pregnant, and I'm going to kill myself." And the salesman, he says, "Damn .??.?you ARE a good sport!"

At seven years old I could REALLY put that joke over—but, tonight the old man's still not laughing. How I learned to say "I Love You" was by laughing for my old man—even if I had to fake it—and that's all I want in return. All I want from him is a laugh, just one laugh, and he's not coming across with even a giggle. Not a snicker. Not even a groan. And worse than not-laughing, the old man squints his eyes shut, tight, and opens them brimming with tears, and one fat tear floods out the bottom of each eye and washes down each cheek. The old man's gasping his big toothless mouth like he can't get enough air, crying big tears down the wrinkles of both cheeks, just soaking his pillow. So this kid—who's nobody's little kid, not anymore—but who can't seem to forget these jokes, he reaches into his pants pocket and gets out a fake carnation flower that just-for-laughs sprays water all over the old crybaby's face.

The kid tells about the Polack who's carrying a rifle through the woods when he comes across a naked gal laying back on a bed of soft green moss with her legs spread, and this gal is a Real Looker, and she looks at the Polack and his gun and says, "What're you doing?" And the Polack says, "I'm hunting for game." And this Real Looker, she gives him a big wink and she says, "I'm game."

So—POW!—the Polack shoots her. It used to be this joke constituted a gold-plated, bona fide, sure-thing laugh riot, but the old man just keeps dying. He's still crying and not even making an effort to laugh, and no matter what, the old man has got to meet me halfway. I can't save him if he doesn't want to live. I ask him, "What do you get when you cross a faggot with a kike?" I ask him, "What's the difference between dog shit

and a nigger?”

And he’s still not getting any better. I’m thinking maybe the cancer’s got into his ears. With the morphine and what all, it could be he can’t hear me. So just to test, can he hear me, I lean into his crybaby face and I ask, “How do you get a nun pregnant?” Then, more loud, maybe too loud for this being a mackerel-snapper hospital, I yell, “You FUCK her!”

In my desperation I try fag jokes and wetback jokes and kike jokes—really, every effective course of treatment known to medical science—and the old man’s still slipping away. Lying here, in this bed, is the man who made EVERYTHING into a Big Joke. Just the fact he’s not biting scares the shit out of me. I’m yelling, “Knock-knock!” and when he says nothing in response it’s the same as him not having a pulse. I’m yelling, “Knock-knock!”

I’m yelling, “Why did the Existentialist cross the road?”

And he’s STILL dying, the old man’s leaving me not knowing the answer to anything. He’s abandoning me while I’m still so fucking stupid. In my desperation I reach out to take the limp, blue fingers of his cold-cold dying hand and he doesn’t flinch even when I grind a Joy Buzzer against the blue skin of his ice-cold palm. I’m yelling, “Knock-knock?”

I’m yelling, “Why’d the Old Lady walk out on her husband and her four-year-old kid?”

Nothing kills a joke like asking my old man to explain himself, and lying there in that bed, he stops breathing. No heartbeat. Totally flatlined.

So this kid who’s sitting bedside in this hospital room, late-late at night he takes the joke equivalent of those electric paddles doctors use to stop your heart attack, the hee-haw equivalent of what a paramedic Robin Williams would use on you in some Clown Emergency Room—a kind of Three Stooges defibrillator—the kid takes a big, creamy, heaped?up custard pie topped with a thick-thick layer of whipped cream, the same as Charlie Chaplin would save your life with, and the kid reaches that pie up sky-high overhead, as high as the kid can reach, and brings it down, hard, lightning-fast, slam-dunking it hard as the blast from a Polack’s - shotgun—POW!—right in his old man’s kisser.

And despite the miraculous, well-documented healing powers of the Comedic Arts my old man dies taking a big bloody shit in his bed.

No, really, it’s funnier than it sounds. Please, don’t blame my old man. If you’re not laughing at this point, it’s my fault. I just didn’t tell it right, you know, you mess up a punch line and you can totally botch even the best joke. For example, I went back to the barbershop and told them how he died and how I tried to save him, right up to and including the custard pie and how the hospital had their security goons escort me up to the crazy ward for a little seventy-two-hour observation. And even telling that part, I fucked it up—because those barbershop guys just looked at me. I told them about seeing—and smelling—my old man, dead and smeared all over with blood and shit and whipped cream, all that stink and sugar, and they looked and looked at me, the barbers and the old guys chewing tobacco, and nobody laughed. Standing in that same barbershop all these years later, I say, “Knock-knock.”

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lawrence Rector:

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