

SNAKE COLOR

Sam, from Brooklyn,
out cutting the weeds
around the warehouse,
sees a snake --

"Whaddy ya mean, 'What color was it?'"
he snaps at me at lunch.
"You a wise guy or somethin?
I'll tell ya what
color it was.
It was snake color!"

-- Ben Jacques

Yarmouth ME

LITANY FOR A RACCOON

The raccoon in the corner of the dining room plays hide-and-seek with her food. At night, I hear the ceramic chatter of the cookie jar lid. The raccoon rinses her Oreos in the dog's water dish. The raccoon thinks Oreos are just ducky. In the morning, the dog sniffs at the crumbs and dustballs in the corner of the dining room before she goes out. I've never seen the raccoon.

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My roommate in college told me his sister found a raccoon in their yard in Owensboro, Kentucky. She brought it to graduation, but left it in the Holiday Inn. The raccoon shit all over the bedspreads on the two double beds in the room. My roommate's father is a doctor. He gave my roommate one thousand dollars on graduation day. My father sent me out for hamburgers and let me keep the change, \$1.38. My roommate wanted to become a veterinarian. I wanted to be a poet. The raccoon was killed by a stray dog my roommate took in and fed.

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Maggie thinks the raccoon is a rat. But I know a rat when I see one. The man who lives behind us raises

laboratory rats in his garage for the University of Michigan. He feeds them a mixture of rat and dog food. Rats don't rinse their food. Rats don't like Oreos because the sugary cream filling bites into the cavities in their teeth. Rats are not as imaginative as raccoons. Rats don't play hide-and-seek with anything but other rats.

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My brother-in-law found a raccoon in the woods behind his Orange, Connecticut, house. He and my sister have a friend who travels and lectures on "The Care and Treatment of Wild Animals in the Home." She told them to fix up a dark cardboard box with a small hole and plenty of blankets. She told them to feed the raccoon milk and raw fish. The raccoon wouldn't eat. The raccoon ripped the blankets into shreds. I told them to feed it Oreos. They laughed over the phone. The raccoon ran away. My two young nieces were heartbroken until dinnertime.

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A raccoon the size of a large dog used to rattle the garbage cans at our cottage at Platte Lake. Michael and I slept on the porch. We tried to catch the raccoon in the act. Michael said the raccoon was the size of a bear cub. He said that its eyes shined in the light of the camera's flash like a cigarette burning orange at both ends. When the photo was developed, it showed nothing but garbage cans tipped over. Every morning we cleaned up the chicken bones and watermelon rinds in the driveway. We never found any Oreo crumbs on the beach. Soon afterward, Michael was drafted and I moved to Detroit.

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I thought I saw a raccoon on Eighteen Mile Road one afternoon. The raccoon crossed the road from a new condominium complex to a new housing development on the other side. I stopped the car and was almost hit from behind. Maggie said I was crazy. She said it couldn't have been a raccoon. I saw the bushes along the road move and got out of the car. I was almost hit from behind. There was nothing in the ditch but briars and thickets. Maggie rolled down her window and said I was crazy. She said there were only deer in the fields beyond the Northfield Financial Building on Crooks Road. She told me to get the hell back into the car. The next day I found a dead raccoon on Eighteen Mile Road.

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I buried a raccoon wrapped in old newspaper. In the grave I placed a half-dozen Oreos and a dish of water. I said a litany in French because I don't know Latin. I knew what to say from my job at the cemetery. The men I work with have never seen a raccoon but once saw a fox run across The Garden of the Last Supper. I found tiny tracks last winter in the snow there. In the spring, we fish ducklings out of the cement lake around the memorial fountain with a dipping net so they won't drown. The ducklings love vanilla wafers but won't eat Oreos. Most of them die soon after they are relocated. I said a litany for the ducklings over the raccoon's grave. My French is terrible.

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Michael wrote that there are raccoons in Korea, but that they are not near as big as the ones in Michigan. I wrote him that there are no raccoons in the Detroit Zoo. The attendant told me that raccoons in captivity starve to death. I told him to feed them Oreos. He said I was crazy. Maggie said we should go see the Polar bears. They sit up and catch thrown marshmallows in their mouths. I threw the Polar bears an Oreo but it fell short and landed in the water in the moat around their cage. I took the rest of the package home and put them in the cookie jar. Three days later, the Oreo was still there, bloated fat, soggy, and three times its normal size. I felt wasteful and stupid. I've never seen the raccoon in the corner of the dining room.

-- Phillip Sterling
Bowling Green OH

NEW SYSTEMS

A long time ago in school I remember hearing about the barter system and how it came unraveled in the face of money. Then close to a decade ago I read in Playboy magazine that we wouldn't be getting money anymore in the not too distant future -- they are going to wipe out our money and finally get down to pure abstractions. Then we will get units.

Say 120 units a week for what you do, if you do anything worth units. If you don't do anything worth units, you are in trouble. You will not be able to steal other