

THE SIGN SAID UNICORN BOOKSHOP  
But The Deer Couldn't Read

by

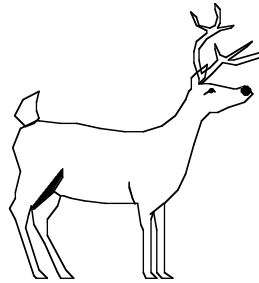
James Dawson

with

*A VISIT FROM ODOCOILEOUS VIRGINIANUS*

*by*

*T.W.C.*



Unicorn Bookshop  
Trappe, Md.

Note: Due to the unfortunate demise of the deer, this story is probably not suitable for children.

A bull in a china shop- sure! But a deer in a bookshop? I hadn't heard of one either, that is until 5:20 p.m. on Friday Feb. 14, 1997 when I was standing by my desk at the Unicorn Bookshop in Trappe, Md. buying books from a book scout.

He was just about to leave when he looked out the window and said, "Hey! look at that deer running across the highway." I turned around to look and, sure enough, a deer was bounding at full speed through U.S. Route 50 traffic, heading right for my shop. We watched as it raced diagonally across my parking lot, turned at the last moment and ran past the front of the building heading for parts unknown and safety. Just as I was about to say "There's something that you don't see everyday." there was a terrific crash as the deer doubled back and leaped through my 1/4 inch thick glass front door and lay in the entry way under a pile of broken glass.

We both stood there frozen, staring at this and I just had time to think "Great, isn't this a mess: a smashed front door and a dead deer in the alcove" when suddenly the deer roused itself and, incredibly, jumped through the second plate glass door and fell into my shop followed by a wave of broken glass. The deer stumbled to its feet and took off to the back of the shop. We heard thumping coming from the rear of the store and it occurred to us that since the rear door was solid steel there would be no way out for the deer, and that it would probably turn around and be on its way back to us. Ray jumped up on the counter and called to me "Get up on the desk! Get up on the desk!" I thought that was pretty ridiculous, this is not a mouse we're dealing with here, but a 140 pound deer. Nevertheless, after half a moments reflection, I hopped up on the desk, grabbed the phone and tried to think of the number for 911.

Oh, yes! It's 9-1-1! I called it and was transferred to the state police. I explained the situation and was told that someone would be right out. The shop was quiet now and the scout and I talked to each other in whispers, afraid that any noise would panic the deer even more. We had no thoughts of leaving either. With such an alarming amount of jagged glass still clinging to both door frames, there was no point in our being guillotined when crawling outside to safety. There was enough glass and blood around already.

After what seemed to be a long time, but probably wasn't, a trooper arrived and after he managed to get through the broken doors I told him what happened. He asked where the deer was and I answered that it was "back there somewhere". He wanted to know if it was a buck or a doe. We thought that it was a young buck, but in the excitement we weren't sure. The trooper wasn't any more anxious to go "back there" than we were and he had a gun. We had all heard stories of cornered deer attacking people with their razor sharp hooves and were taking no chances.

Finally, the trooper inched his way along the bloody trail as I brought up the rear. The trail took a right turn down a narrow paperback aisle and then doubled back to the rooms in the rear. We peered into the middle room (children's books, gardening books and, ominously, books on animals and nature). Was this a literate deer shopping for a gift? but there was no deer. We peeked into the back room and there was no deer there

either. What the heck?

Suddenly, I cried out “Oh my god! its gone upstairs to the map room.” Sure enough, the trail circled around the room and then went up the stairs. The trooper stomped his foot and there was an answering thump from upstairs. We had no desire to go up there.

By this time, reinforcements had arrived and several troopers went upstairs to have a look. I heard running and thumping and expected that they could get a choke hold on the deer and lead it downstairs. There was more running and thumping and then a big crash. Finally, the first trooper came down and told me that they would have to shoot it, and asked another trooper where the shotgun was.

“You can’t go shooting up there!”, I said “I’ve got antique maps, antique furniture...” I had visions of holes being blasted in the walls and shreds of rare maps floating down stairs like confetti, a banjo clock blown to smithereens, blood and buckshot would be splattered everywhere. A real shoot-out at the Unicorn Corral- I wasn’t very O.K. about that! I asked them if they couldn’t tranquilize it, but the DNR was closed for the weekend and no one had a tranquilizer gun. Couldn’t they mace it? They laughed at that suggestion- that would *really* make it mad. There seemed to be no option but to shoot it, but at least now they opted to use a pistol instead.

The trooper asked if there were any residences nearby. I said yes, an elderly, bad tempered person lived next door. He walked over to tell her that there was a deer loose in the bookshop and they were going to shoot it and, in case any bullets went through the wall, would she please move to the far end of her house.

I wasn’t happy that they would have to shoot the deer, perhaps it would be better to just let it stay up there. If it recovered from its wounds, I could feed it and in time tame it and it could be a mascot. Other bookshops had animals and I could have a store deer. Perhaps I could strap a horn on its head and charge admission to see the real genu-wine unicorn. Or maybe it would be easier to change the name of the store to the Deer Bookshop. Alas, fate had other plans for this deer. I heard one or two shots and a crash and I climbed up the stairs slowly, dreading what I would see.

The deer lay at the far end of the room under pieces of an antique cabinet, still alive, but certainly in shock. It was a doe. It was looking at me and I said to it “Poor deer, you’re not having a very good day are you?” The cops looked at me like I was crazy. I looked around and decided that I wasn’t having a very good day either. The upstairs windows were unbroken because of the security grating. They proved to be deer proof, but some were smeared with blood when the deer tried to jump through and the grate at the far end of the store was bowed from the impact. The walls were streaked with blood where the deer apparently tried to climb up them and there was even a five inch diameter hole on the eight foot high drywall ceiling. Several maps had hoof holes in them and an antique chair had a hole precisely in the center of its rush bottom seat. For such a narrow room, it’s about eight feet wide, it was amazing that there wasn’t more damage. The clock still ticked in the corner inches away from blood smears. I didn’t even want to know what the carpet looked like.

It became apparent that the deer wasn’t going to die immediately and would have to be shot in the head to be put out of its misery. I walked to the far end of the room and turned away. There was a loud bang and it was all over for the deer.

The first trooper asked me some questions for his paperwork and gave me his card. The police started to leave and I said "Hey, wait a minute! What about the deer?" Well, they didn't do deer. If I wanted it, they would give me a tag. I didn't want it and asked if they knew of someone who could take it away. Yes, there was someone in town, when would I like it removed? I thought of the body lying upstairs in the center of an ever widening pool of blood and answered "How about now?" and so he made the call. The police left and soon someone came to carry away the deer wrapped in a thick plastic sheet leaving a huge gout of blood on the carpet, soaking into the floor.

I phoned my insurance company and they were actually rather understanding about everything. It was imperative that the door be secured for the night and the place cleaned up so I could open the next day. They mentioned several professional cleaners who did such things and said if I needed any more help to call her anytime.

I called the first one listed in the yellow pages. They had a large flashy ad promising 24 hour emergency service. I talked to a recording that promised that someone would call me back immediately. I waited awhile, but they didn't call. I am still waiting for them to call. The second cleaner had a medium sized ad and also promised round the clock service. This time I talked to a real person who obviously had no intention of coming out. Perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned all of the blood. The last phone number had no ad with it and promised nothing, and that was just what I expected as I left a message on their machine. To my surprise, someone called me back immediately. I asked them if they did blood. They said yes and that they would be right over.

I was not able to reach the contractor that the insurance company recommended. I had not realized that St. Valentine's Day was such a popular holiday. I phoned someone in town who came out right away and started cutting plywood to barricade the door and helped us sweep up the broken glass.

The cleaners arrived: two very big men dressed like they'd just come from an massacre. I thought to myself "Geez, who are these guys?" but actually "these guys" turned out to very nice fellows and totally professional- and who wants to wear good clothes when cleaning up after a gore-fest anyway? They had excellent references having cleaned up after a particularly gruesome triple murder the previous year, not to mention several Christmas suicides. This was nothing.

They went right to work with special disinfectants and vacuum cleaners. They said that any blood, human or animal, is treated like hazardous waste for fear of disease and everything bloody had to be washed down. The waste had to be sent to Philadelphia to be disposed of. In case you ever have a lot of blood you need cleaned up quickly, be warned that the service call alone is \$500 and then it's \$200 an hour after that. They worked on my store for about 4 1/2 hours. They once spent 38 hours cleaning up a Pizza Hut (I didn't want to know what happened there). You have to be licensed by the state to do this kind of work and even get special shots to work around blood. Needless to say, they wore heavy rubber gloves.

To relieve the tension we started to joke around about the "deer-ly departed", not for reasons of callousness, but as a way of dealing with the situation. The phrase "Doe, Ray and Me" seemed to sum up my evening's adventure. I said that I had a "NO SMOKING" sign on the door, so now I'd have to get a "NO DEER ALLOWED" sign also.

Someone suggested that since it was Valentine's Day, that the deer had fallen in love with the picture of the unicorn on the door and had come in to visit. More advice: get a DEER X-ING sign for the door (actually this did not seem like a bad idea). This is a rural area and although I'd often worried about hitting a deer with my car, I never worried about hitting one with my store. Other signs were suggested: "THE BUCK STOPS HERE" for one, "HIND SIGHT IS BETTER THAN FUR SIGHT" for another.

The door was boarded up by now and the upstairs was being scrubbed down. Ray had stayed to help clean up, but now that things were settling down, he left to pick up his family who by now had been stranded at Wal-Mart for over three hours. I had been remarkably calm so far, but now that things were under control, I started to get hyper. It started to rain. A friend watched the shop while I went home to get something to eat.

When I went back up the stairs, the cleaners were still at it. As bad as it was, it could have been far worse. Amazingly enough, not a single book had been damaged or even knocked down. What if there had been customers in the shop? What if there had been someone upstairs? I'd heard of deer getting into homes and businesses and doing incredible amounts of damage. A deer had broken through a plate glass window and trashed a video store. Three deer had gotten into a house and destroyed furniture, smashed windows and walls before they were shot. I was lucky.

Part of the carpet was too gory to be cleaned and a 3 x 6 foot section was cut out to be disposed of. Even if the carpet could have been cleaned, the chemicals would have bleached it white. Even the plywood floor beneath it would have to be replaced. The bullet holes would have to be plugged up and the holes in the dry wall repaired. None of the bullets appeared to have penetrated the walls so apparently my neighbor was still alive. The walls and ceiling would have to be painted and the downstairs carpet would probably have to be replaced, too. Blood stains are hard to remove and the deer had gashed herself badly on the door. The cleaners packed up and left and I got home about 1 A.M., but I couldn't get to sleep until after 4.

I was back at the store first thing next morning and open for business at about 9. I had no hopes that it had all been a horrible dream. The plywood on the door was much too tangible of a reminder for that.

I thought I'd better call the local paper and tell them what happened. At one time, there had been at least six patrol cars in my parking lot with their lights flashing and radios squawking. The call had gone out that there was an intruder in the bookshop which was true enough, but instead of John Dillinger, they got John Doe.

There is no telling what the neighbors thought- probably that it was a drug bust or something. I talked to a reporter and gave a fairly coherent, but increasingly strident account as the events of the previous evening came flooding back on me. I was worried that the story would be sensationalized and could imagine the supermarket tabloid style headlines now "I KILLED BAMBI'S MOM!!' BOOKSELLER CONFESSES". Wouldn't that be good for business. Fortunately, the article was more to the point, it was titled "DEER RUNS AMOK IN BOOKSTORE". I had no problem with that.

My insurance company ended up paying several thousand dollars to repair the building. They did not pay for the damage to the furniture and maps as deer damage to the stock was not specifically listed in my insurance contract. And frankly, if they had offered it to me at a slight additional charge, I probably would have laughed.

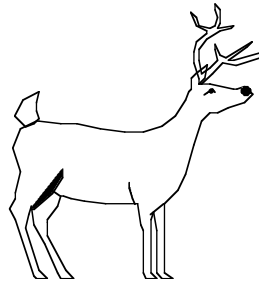
Predictably, the deer had no insurance.

By the way, certain ungenerous friends accused me of staging the whole event as a publicity stunt and they wanted to know how I lured the deer into the store. Well, there is no truth to that rumor, but whatever you think, there's no doubt that February 14th turned out to be a real St. Valentine's Day Massacre.

I did put a sign on the door. A picture of a leaping deer in a red circle with a slash through it which in international sign language means "No Deer!"

So far, it has worked perfectly and I have not been troubled by any more hoofed intruders.

Maybe deer *can* read.



## *A VISIT FROM ODOCOILEOUS VIRGINIANUS*

*by*

*T.W.C.*

[Note: the bad guy represented here is fictitious and any resemblance any of the professionals who helped me that night is entirely coincidental.]

***T'*** *was some weeks after Christmas, on Valentine's Day*

***The book shop was closing, without further delay;***

***The books were ensconced on the bookshelves with care,***

***Suggesting that literate elves had been there;***

***Jim Dawson, the owner, and his trusty book scout,***

*Had just spotted a deer as it wandered about.  
When at the front door there arose such a clatter,  
They sprang up on the desk wondering what was the matter.  
As they peeked out the window, set to make a mad dash,  
Just then without warning came a second loud crash.  
The wound on the breast of the now-fallen doe  
Made it lunge at the doorway, hence the shattering blow.  
When what to their wondering eyes should appear,  
But the frightened and injured and blood-spattered deer.  
As it coursed through the shop, still lively and quick,  
They knew it was either plumb crazy or sick.  
Much slower than sloths Dawson dialed 9-1-1,  
Blurted into the phone "There's a deer on the run!"  
It's dashin' and dancin' and prancin' and kickin'  
And bleedin' and poopin'...I'm starting to sicken!  
It broke down the door and gouged up a wall!  
Either mace it or shoot it! Please respond to my call!"  
With dry heaves, behind the wild hairy thing nigh,  
Scared to encounter the beast, wondering which one would die.  
So back through the bookshelves, with curses, Jim drew  
Towards the stairs to the map room; was the deer up there, too?  
And then in a twinkling he heard 'neath the roof  
The prancing and pawing of each cervine hoof.  
As he drew in his breath and was turning around,  
A big guy came in without making a sound.*

*He was dressed all in black from his head to his feet,  
And his badge was all tarnished and his clothes all un-neat.*

*A .357 he had strapped to his hip,  
And his hand was upon it in a white knuckled grip.  
His eyes-they were beady! He'd age-lines of worry!  
His cheeks were all flabby, his nose- a strawberry!  
His cruel little mouth was drawn up in a sneer,  
He looked like a slob who would slaughter a deer;  
A loaded shotgun in the crook of his arm,  
Made me firmly believe that he meant to do harm.  
He had a bored face and a big rotund belly,  
Which I'll bet contained lots of good stuff from a deli.  
He was reckless and dumb, a low-browed reprobate,  
And I cringed when I thought of that hapless deer's fate.  
A glimpse of his gun loaded chock-full of lead,  
Soon gave me to know I had plenty to dread;  
He spoke not a word, as he crept up the stairs,  
You'd have thought he was going to do battle with bears,  
And pointing his pistol at that antlerless head,  
And squeezing the trigger, the poor deer fell dead.  
As he walked down the stairs, he started to whistle,  
While I felt like a man who'd been struck by a missile.  
But I heard him exclaim as he strode out the door,  
"My work here is done. You clean up the gore"!*

**The Very End.**



An earlier version of this story appeared in the Sept. 8, 1997 issue of *AB Bookmans Weekly*. The poem is published here for the first time. Thanks to T.W.C. for letting me use it.

Unicorn Bookshop; P.O. Box 154; Trappe, Md. 21673; 410-476-3838  
www.unicornbookshop.com  
email: unicornbookshop@verizon.net

