

**AN UNPROFESSIONAL KISS**  
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The moment he was born they changed his name to Anvil. He was the strongest, wiriest newborn the doctor had ever seen, and, though the doctor didn't say it, one of the ugliest.

Anvil walked at 9 months and began talking a month later though all through life if he did talk he got right to the point. Anvil's parents were impressed to see him reading a book out loud at 3½. Surely, he had memorized it – it was a book they had read to him often. But when they put a new book in front of him, he read that too, although slowly.

Anvil arrived at school as the tallest, strongest, fastest, smartest and ugliest kid. He was more than smart enough to know how ugly he was. That knowledge made him both sad and sensitive to anyone else's woes. And though he never hurt anyone deliberately, kids around him seemed to get hurt all the time. As one kid put it, "Running into Anvil feels like running into a telephone pole." Perhaps that was why Anvil was careful to be so gentle.

Despite Anvil's grotesque looks he was so strong that no one in his class dared make fun of him. Besides, he was so serene and kind that most of them grew to like him after overcoming their initial fear or revulsion. But he was a natural target for older bullies. When he was in second grade some nasty fourth graders thought they found a sucker. And, having gotten no response from their initial taunts, they set about riding him mercilessly. He churned inside silently until the day they cornered him on the monkey bars. He retreated to the top with remarkable agility and locked his legs around the top bars, while they slithered up around him like snakes. The biggest of his tormenters got too close. Big mistake! Anvil reached out and grabbed the kid by the throat with one hand, drew the kid to him, eyed him with silent, piercing eyes, then picked him up with two arms stretched straight over his head, and threw the kid off. The kid bounced against the lower bars and struck the rubber floor mat, breaking his forearm in the fall, and lucky he didn't break more.

Several of Anvil's classmates witnessed the scene and testified to it. One boy described it graphically. "Anvil looked like King Kong on the Empire State Building, and threw the kid like Kong threw the airplane he caught." The principal knew that Anvil was justified but was still obligated to call him into the office. "Anvil, I've never seen anyone near so strong as you in second grade. And I know those 4<sup>th</sup> graders were mean and were asking for it. But I hope you can see how important it is for you to control yourself and be gentle. After all, you know the saying, sticks and stones." Anvil promised to try and meant it.

But he didn't have to try. After that incident, no one ever made fun of Anvil – at least, to his face. And his new nickname, Kong, always announced reverentially rather than simply spoken, stuck through grade school.

By the time Anvil reached High School, he had grown into a giant and every coach was after him. A natural in every sport, he was as graceful and fast as he was strong and ugly. But after he

hurt a varsity player trying out for the wrestling team, he decided against joining any team of contact sports, and unfortunately for him, the high school did not have a track or swim team.

So, it was in college that Anvil discovered the joy of the shot put and the hammer throw. There he could use his great strength and speed without hurting anyone. Oh, how he loved to launch the hammer and watch it sail over the field! His teammates watched in awe. One time they saw him hurl it 271 feet. His coach told him, "Anvil, there's no limit to what you can do if you weren't so wiry. I'd like you to bulk up." Anvil responded immediately and succinctly, "Coach, no steroids! Ever!" That was when the coach realized how aptly the normally pliant Anvil was named.

It was in college that Anvil settled on his career or rather, it settled on him. He was enamored of literature. And, with girls entranced by his strength, yet repelled by his ugliness so that he remained unloved, *Frankenstein* was one of his favorite books. His size, his strength, and his looks made Anvil a natural to play monsters, and at least one college play was chosen and altered with him in mind. He discovered, somewhat to his surprise, that he had considerable dramatic talent. The theatre professor was so impressed watching Anvil during rehearsals that he called a theatrical agent, insisting he come to watch Anvil perform. The agent came, saw, and signed Anvil on the spot. Anvil's first screen test launched his career. His future director, Darius, a gruff, blunt man who was never known to smile told him, "You're a natural. The camera absolutely loves you. Not like Rita Hayworth, mind you, but it sure does love you."

So began Anvil's acting career. In a slew of B rated films he portrayed almost every imaginable incarnation of evil. Anvil willingly slaughtered masses and terrorized hapless young virgins. But there was one role he steadfastly refused to play despite cajoling, imprecations and dire threats by Darius. That role was as a rapist. Given how sweet and compliant Anvil usually was this refusal seemed totally out of character, but Anvil remained adamant. "I'm OK with killing them but I won't abuse them. Women are particularly sensitive to any form of abuse and they find me repulsive enough already." Ultimately, growling Darius had to relent.

The outside world did not see a hint of Anvil's real, sweet nature; so many moviegoers ascribe to the person the character the actor portrays. And, given confirmation by his ugliness, Anvil soon became widely hated as the monstrosity he appeared to be. The coup de grace occurred when he played in a series of films as a fiend who got off on torturing disabled people before pitilessly and brutally killing them.

Anvil quickly grew wealthy but even more miserable. You'd think that celebrity status, even playing the Devil himself, might have brought Anvil success with women, but his vile reputation and his looks combined with an unbroken series of rejections to make a lonely, even shaken man.

Of all people, Anvil's director, Darius saw with greatest clarity the ironic contrast between the monster Anvil played and the kind, sensitive man Anvil was. So, one day, Darius, seeing Anvil off-set looking particularly disconsolate, confronted him. "Look", he said, "Your problem is that you *appear* so ugly and evil. That's the outside. Inside, you're a cream puff and a gem. Have you ever thought about volunteering at the Academy of the Blind? They'll love you there." Anvil recalled that Frankenstein's monster's brief and only friendship was with a blind man. It was a good idea.

So Anvil found solace and love among the blind, for sound without sight made him lovable. He worked mainly with the young children, who particularly loved him. He told them, "I play the monster in many movies." When they asked him why, he was candid. "Because I'm so ugly I'm deformed. Just to look at me scares people." The blind children were perplexed until he told them the story of Beauty and the Beast. One girl said to him, "Some day Beauty will fall in love with you and kiss you and you will become handsome." Anvil turned away and sobbed.

The blind children never saw him as ugly. They alone were able to see that he was beautiful. And how they loved his great strength! He would sometimes stand swinging three kids apiece on each outstretched arm. To these kids, he was an edifice. And he noted that blindness made the kids kinder. There was much less bullying and teasing among the blind children.

Entertainers often came to the Academy to perform for the kids. One morning, a troop of graduate theatre majors came and had all the kids in stitches. Anvil stood silently on the sidelines relishing it all with a big smile on his sad face. When the performance was over, he led the kids back to their classes and went down to the faculty cafeteria for lunch. A short time later the troop rambled in boisterously. One of them, who seemed to be the ringleader, came right over to Anvil. "You're Anvil, aren't you? Those blind kids love you." And without waiting for an answer, he asked, "Is it OK if we join you?" Anvil welcomed them. The ringleader confessed, "We're all your fans. You're one of the great truly evil characters in the history of film. We'd love it if you'd perform for our university theatre club."

Anvil's head was turned. It was an extraordinary compliment to be compared to such masters as Lon Chaney and Boris Karloff. So, even though Anvil sensed something sleazy about the guy, this was an invitation he couldn't turn down. Arrangements were made over the next several weeks and a time was set for his appearance the next month in the small repertory theatre with a seating capacity of about 200. Anvil demanded conditions. He would bring his technical staff, make a video of the performance, and not allow anyone from the university backstage from the time he and his staff arrived until the end of the performance.

Anvil researched for his presentation, deliberating over its design, structure, script (leaving room for ad-libs), and technical aspects. He would discuss the nature and history of horror films, describe a few of his roles, tell a bit of what goes into making horror films and how scenes with special effects are created, give a sample scary skit, and conclude gently by telling how what he really felt helped him enter the minds and souls of his characters. He rehearsed assiduously and fine tuned it.

He arrived nervous for his performance. All through the setup backstage he was surprised to find himself shaking. When the students had filed in Anvil peeked through the closed curtains and was pleased to see the small theatre full. He was ready. The curtain opened only a little – barely enough to reveal the podium. Applause greeted Anvil as he walked to the podium.

This was his first lecture-performance before a live audience. He surveyed them. It was a good looking, eager university crowd. Then his eyes fixed on an extraordinarily beautiful young woman in the first row. Smiling at her, he announced, "I see we have Beauty here. Beauty will

be the perfect volunteer for our scary little skit.” But beneath the seemingly confident smile his heart thumped, as a feeling of profound sadness almost overwhelmed him. With all his talents, given his looks, there wasn’t a chance in hell that such a beauty could ever be part of his life.

But Anvil was a professional. He righted himself and began a fine presentation. “Horror films get a bum rap, but ones that tell a compelling tale will always draw large audiences. We are all simultaneously repelled by and drawn to terror. There is something alluring and exciting about danger. We all live and write horror films. They are called nightmares. When we are kids, terror stands alone as a draw. But as we mature another ingredient is interwoven with terror that makes the attraction to it electromagnetic. That ingredient is our strongest drive – sex. And in horror films, it is sex by brute force, invariably perverted and full of pathos because it is bereft of the remotest chance of love. And it is by virtue of this impossibility that horror movies teach us the necessity and incalculable value of true love.”

But as Anvil rhapsodized he observed something nasty about the audience reaction. Too many of students were openly snickering at his deepest revelations, mocking him as if he were one of the deviant freaks in his films rather than a rational, knowledgeable analyst of the genre and a skilled, experienced, and profoundly emotional actor. He felt humiliated as the undeserving butt of their ridicule and found himself growing furious. He wanted to crush them.

It was time in his presentation for the little skit. He stopped, then slowly turned and looked down upon Beauty as if she were alone with him in the theatre. His gaze had such intensity that the mocking audience grew stone silent. Without a word from Anvil, Beauty almost floated up to the stage and stood looking transfixed at his side by the podium. On the spur of the moment Anvil changed the order of his presentation. With Beauty motionless beside him, he began talking about how his acting grew out of his real life as a deformed monster and described his feelings of rejection, isolation, and loneliness. Some snickering started again, but stopped as Anvil’s appearance turned sinister. The audience grew visibly uncomfortable. Then, as Anvil growled, “Now for your little skit,” his look rose to such a peak of malice he had everyone cringing.

In a wild, visibly quivering rage he abruptly turned 90 degrees, facing Beauty. With amazing speed and dexterity he lifted her high over his head and, as she screamed in terror, threw her in a high arc behind the mostly-closed curtain. There was a ghastly crunching sound followed by dead silence. Anvil flashed a look of horror at what he had done. He then turned sharply back toward the audience, glared venomously at them for the briefest moment, and abruptly fled backstage. The curtain was quickly closed.

A few seconds later, one of Anvil’s technical assistants rushed out in a panic from behind the closed curtain and begged desperately for help from the audience. Several people bounded up to the stage. But the instant they reached the stage, the curtain was opened wide to reveal what all feared would be a grisly scene. What they saw instead was Beauty, still a bit stunned but resting quite comfortably indeed on top of a towering pile of air mattresses. A huge sandbag lay crumpled on a large sounding board at the foot of the tower. The only assistance needed was to get Beauty off the tower. It had all been a charade – or had it?

Once the audience recovered, they began chanting for Anvil to come out and take a bow. Everyone realized they had witnessed an extraordinary performance by a master they had grossly misunderstood and maligned. But though it *was* his greatest performance, because he had so completely revealed his soul and was so nearly real, Anvil, certain that it had been a fiasco, really had fled the stage.

A crowd of Beauty's fellow theatre majors surrounded her, asking about her experience. "You must have been scared out of your wits."

"No, not at all! I think I was hypnotized. You can't believe how incredibly gentle he was and how safe I felt."

Then why did you scream?"

"I did?"

"You kidding? You screamed horribly."

Beauty then confessed that she was ashamed she had agreed to join the group in mocking Anvil. Given his masterful performance, many of the others admitted they had been mean and nasty. So, they sent a representative group to the movie studio to apologize, but Anvil refused them admittance. They made several other failed attempts to meet him and apologize, even showing up at the Academy for the Blind, where they were also turned away peremptorily despite their admirable performance there. So they gave up.

Anvil hoped to put his humiliating appearance at the college out of his mind but every member of his technical staff insisted it was a masterful performance and that he must watch the video. Now, Anvil was a professional and in watching the video, not only was he impressed by his own mastery, but he saw that something extraordinary had transpired up there on stage. He also saw how crucial Beauty had been in heightening the mood. He showed the video to Darius and insisted that Beauty be called and auditioned. "She was astonishing without knowing it. She made me look more imposing and horrid than ever. But don't breathe a word that I had anything to do with the call."

Darius stared at Anvil and blurted out, "Holy cow! You love her, Anvil!" But continuing his gaze, he added, "We'll give her an audition. Why not? She's a beauty, that's for sure! And she was mesmerizing because you mesmerized her. She has a crush on you for sure, Anvil – maybe because you're so ugly."

Anvil's face betrayed everything he felt – "No one so beautiful could love someone so ugly." It prompted Darius to say, "You know, Anvil, I think you're comfortable with those blind kids not because they're blind but because you are." Anvil heard the words but was not capable of absorbing the message.

Beauty couldn't believe it when she got the audition call and thought at first Anvil was playing a prank on her as a form of revenge. But it was real enough, and though she looked for Anvil at the

interview and at the audition, he was nowhere to be found. Through each take she felt awkwardly nervous and wooden, and found herself clinging to a strange hope that Anvil would appear to calm and loosen her.

Her audition was a fiasco and she knew it. She was told curtly that they would contact her but it was obvious they wouldn't. She cleared out as fast as she could.

Darius called Anvil to view the audition tape. Anvil agreed that she was a disaster. He couldn't understand it. Darius said, "When some people see the camera strange things happen to them. She's hopeless! And she's a theatre major? I refuse to believe it."

When Anvil protested Darius cut him off and said, "Listen, she has a crush on you. It's obvious. Just, go and date her, Anvil. That's all you really want, anyway. Keep her far from the camera."

But Anvil refused to be put off. He didn't quite know if it was raw love or raw professional instinct. He only knew that he was a master monster when she was near. He was relentless with Darius. In exasperation Darius caved in and asked, "Will you be satisfied if we let her appear silently and briefly in a few scenes?" Anvil jumped up like a kid and hugged the stone-faced director.

Beauty was incredulous and ecstatic that she had won her first movie role. A perfectionist, she wanted to make the most of it. She got videos of all Anvil's films, none of which she had ever seen or had ever wished to see. She couldn't believe how puerile they all were. Here was a brilliant, sensitive man who was wasting his talent playing such violently unredeemable characters. But she had to admit he was a darned convincing monster.

When Beauty requested a copy of the script, she was greeted with laughter and told she wouldn't need it. She persisted until they finally sent her a copy. Then she understood the laughter and the comment. She did not have a single spoken word unless you count a scream as a word. Even so, she read the script word for word from beginning to end as if she were author, screenwriter, and director. The script was inane. Her abiding reaction was to ask herself again, "How could anyone as talented and brilliant as Anvil consent to act in such an idiotic film?"

At school, the news that Beauty had won a part in a film transformed her into a local celebrity. Her friends offered to help her rehearse her lines, an offer she graciously and elusively refused. And when they asked her about her role, all she would say was, "It's a role to die for," and she said it so gravely it left everyone feeling jealous with heightened curiosity.

Beauty, who was in her young twenties, looked younger and so pure that she was cast and made up as an innocent, yet unconsciously seductive teen, dressed in white, showing a tiny bit of cleavage. She was to make brief appearances in three scenes. By luck the filming of her scenes coincided with Spring Break so that she could spend the week watching how other young actresses acted when Anvil stalked and eliminated them. There was an awful lot of screaming. It was both terrible and laughable to watch and it gave Beauty some idea of how and how not to act when her turn came.

In each of her three scenes she was to stroll through a tulip garden set in an opening of the spruce forest in a remote corner of the Botanical Gardens. The first two strolls were mere cameos. Anvil noticed her on her first stroll, and was transfixed by her beauty and innocence, but, of course, she didn't see him. Neither did she see him on her second walk, when he began to stalk her, but had to stop when, by chance, two policemen passed by, inadvertently saving her as Anvil held back in the shadows.

Beauty wanted to rehearse her third and important scene with Anvil, but at every break in the filming Anvil either disappeared or surrounded himself with a crowd so that she could not even approach him. At lunch on her 4<sup>th</sup> day there, Darius, seeing her at an empty table alone, nervous, and forlorn, asked if he could join her. He didn't beat around the bush. "Isn't this a new and valuable experience for you? So, why the sad face?" With eyes turned down, all Beauty dared say was that she was sad she was unable to rehearse her scene. Darius sensed she had more on her mind but let it pass. He said only, "Yes! Anvil does seem to be avoiding you. It's strange considering how ardently he argued on your behalf." Beauty's eyes flashed directly toward Darius, revealing her shock. She had never thought for a moment that Anvil's lobbying was the reason she was here and had been certain that if he saw her lousy audition he hated it. Darius gave her his most compassionate look and continued. "You should trust Anvil! He knows what he's doing, professionally at least. Just put yourself in his hands and you'll be fantastic."

Indeed, her third, death scene would turn out to be the one that made the film a cult classic.

Beauty's death scene was scheduled for that afternoon, but Anvil said that the soft, misty light of early morning provided the ideal mood. Darius agreed and Anvil disappeared. After a very restless night for Beauty, filming of the scene began in a clearing mist shortly after dawn.

The moment Beauty emerged from the forest edge Anvil flitted into sight in the distance but was gone in a flash. His subliminal appearance made Beauty lose a step, but then, seeing nothing, she resumed her stroll, looking preciously timid. As she reached the center of the tulip bed, Anvil reappeared suddenly, landing in front of her in a single, gigantic bound. He clutched at her wrist. She screamed terribly, broke free, turned and ran. But in typical horror movie fashion, she tripped and fell, rolling on her back amidst the tulips. Anvil pounced on her like a lion. A few dew drops from the wavering flowers glistened on Beauty's face, giving her an angelic illumination.

As Anvil hovered motionless over Beauty, time ceased and everything went stone silent. Anvil gazed upon Beauty with such intensity and longing that her look changed from horror to a mixture of surrender and awakening desire. Her look sent an uncontrollable shudder through Anvil's whole being. For the briefest moment his monstrous visage was softened by a glimmer of gentleness. As it did, a faint but somehow distinct throttling sound emerged from the depths of Beauty's untouched throat. Beauty's neck then snapped backwards in such a way that it was impossible to tell if she or he did it. Beauty was dead.

Then the shadow of utter remorse spread over Anvil's face. He lifted dead Beauty gently so that her face almost touched his. Everyone was sure that he would kiss her, so tormented did his hopeless passion appear. But a rabbit rustled nearby, and Anvil jumped up and fled.

Despite being jaded by watching countless theatrical murders over multiple filming days of multiple horror films, just about every member of the crew and cast gasped involuntarily at the scene's intensity. They had witnessed unscripted perfection. Everyone was sure there would not even be a thought of doing a second take. But as Beauty, still dazed, continued to lie there motionless amidst the tulips, Darius barked at Anvil to return. "You should have kissed her! This scene must culminate with a kiss."

Anvil stiffened in personal and professional protest. "Are you nuts? A kiss is the worst, most idiotic idea imaginable. When a frog kisses Beauty, it is transformed to a prince. There's no transformation for this frog and kissing an unchangeable frog is and looks ridiculous. It'll kill the film. It'll drive audiences away. They'll avoid it like the plague."

The veins in Darius's temples bulged and his eyes reddened. "What gall! You have zero sense and less insight. The kiss is vital. You'll do that damned kiss. And while you're having your tantrum like the willful infant you are, Beauty is soaked and freezing waiting for her frog."

Seeing Beauty shivering, Anvil resumed his position and tried to recapture the mood of the critical moment. Appearing in turmoil, he gently lifted the prone Beauty to his face, her face bent back and arms hanging limply. As he pressed his lips against hers with a genuinely hopeless look, he saw her eyes open and look into his. Amazed, he felt her arms encircle him and he was enveloped by her warm breath.

"Cut!" Darius shot up from the Director's chair and stormed over to the tulip bed. Glowering at both Anvil and Beauty, he yelled at them furiously, "That was egregiously unprofessional."

But, following an abrupt about face, as Darius strode back to his Director's chair, rumor has it that he was grinning like a kid.