

I have a friend named Laurence, who literally knows everything about everything. He's not just one of those types who thinks he knows it all; he actually does know it all. Laurence is a good guy to learn from.

One day he was telling me about this study that says that too much caffeine causes kidney cancer. It makes perfect sense right? Because coffee makes you have to pee all the time. At least it does with me anyway, and so it's gotta be beating up your kidneys. Plus there's the study; not to mention my friend, Laurence's, reporting.

So I was at an office meeting right after that, and I'm telling you, half the staff of probably like thirty people were drinking coffee. That's close to fifteen people slurping up cancer as I'm sitting there going nuts on what only I knew. Finally, about halfway through the meeting, I had to let them have it.

"People!" I actually interrupted my boss griping about how no one was even attempting to meet time projections. Why should they, when so many of them were getting cancer? Anyway, everything came to a halt, allowing me to pass along my caffeine revelation. Sure, there were skeptics. There always are. But I got all but about ten or twelve to dump their coffee, right then and there.

Another time Laurence told me how the opponent of the guy I was going to vote for as my state representative had introduced a bill legalizing puppy mills, when he himself, together with his mother, had owned and operated one of the worst puppy mills in this part of the country.

"You can look it up if you don't believe me!" But I believed him, because I hated that politician. I knew he was up to no good, and Laurence only confirmed what I already knew. I told a lady at work about it, and she said I had it all wrong. It was the guy I liked who had mistreated dogs for years. She even showed me a damn newspaper article. Well, I looked over the story for a moment, but then realized it was from the Herald, which I'd long suspected of bias anyway, and especially more so lately. Sometimes you just never know what to believe.

Laurence did actually lie to me this one time. Man did it tick me off. One chilly spring night, he was supposed to pick me up after work, and take the both of us and another guy to the ball game. For two hours I waited outside my work, freezing, because my jacket was so thin. I'd been figuring on having him swing by my apartment for a heavier coat, but well, that never happened. Maybe about three hours I waited. Anyway, he wouldn't answer his phone, wouldn't answer my texts, and my suspicion that he was avoiding me definitely became verified the following day, when my aunt swung me by his place.

"What the hell happened?"

"Whadaya mean?" He was smacking yellow gum, making my intestines twist with each chomp.

"Aw c'mon, don't even give me that crap. You know I'm talking about the game last night."

"Ohh..." And then you could see the wheels spinning, because his eyes went everywhere but mine. "Let me tell you what happened..."

The details and the sequence certainly aren't necessary since they were fiction anyway. There was some garbage about his cousin needing a ride to the emergency room for a sudden appendectomy. I never even heard of this dude. The cousin's girlfriend fell in love at first sight

with Laurence, and evidently they began the night chatting in the waiting room, and ended the night at his place. That part was probably the closest to being true.

"Why are you so mad, man?"

I told him how I'd gotten locked out after work closed, and how I'd been waiting for three or more hours before I finally walked the couple of miles to my aunt's house. He didn't have to know how I'd called her. I sure was mad, as much for the lie as for anything. I don't think I've ever been so cold. But I got over it.

Where was I going with this? I don't know, but I do have another story. Laurence and I love chili. We actually met at a chili cook off, and we've shared recipes for years. Anyway, he told me about a friend of his who told him a supposed family secret where you slow cook the beans for a little while longer than normal, but at a low temperature, and the flavor you get is out of this world. We were having a big contest that next week, but I don't experiment around with that kind of stuff for actual events. I mean I've got my chili formula down exact, and I only fool around with small changes here and there when I've got nothing going on for awhile.

So I told another friend about the bean trick.

It seems like when you get information like that, you should try it out ahead of time. Or at least check it out on the internet. But Craig didn't. He said that slow cooking the beans sounded fantastic, and that he was sick of coming in fourth, like he had for I guess three straight times, and he was gonna go for it. I'd never even placed in the top five, so fourth would've been just fine with me, but some people are just hypercompetitive.

Well, anyway, I don't really know what happened. About an hour after the thing started, a bunch of people started getting sick. Like really sick. Five people were taken to the hospital, and one's still there a week later. Some of these, what you'd have to call "food scientists" started testing everybody's chili, and low and behold, they said the problem was with Craig's.

Now this reminds me of a joke. A trucker goes into a diner, and the waitress asks, "What'll you have?"

"Chili, please," he says.

She answers, "Sorry, that man there took the last of it."

He looks over, and sees a guy with a full bowl of chili getting ready to leave.

"Say, if you're not gonna eat that, do you mind if I have it?"

"Help yourself."

So the trucker downs half the bowl, fast, cuz he's starving, and suddenly at the bottom of the bowl, he sees a mouse. Then up comes the chili he's already eaten, right back into the bowl, on top of the mouse.

The waitress says, "That's what happened to the other guy."