

T H E
oddtville press



S P R I N G 2 0 1 6

C O V E R A R T

Alternate Orbit

Squire Broel

"Squire Broel's large scale sculptures echo familiar forms found in the works of artists and carvers such as Constantin Brancusi, Barbara Hepworth, Alberto Giacometti, Henry Hunt, Nathan Jackson, and Chief Mungo Martin. Made in bronze, aluminum and wood, these totemic structures are suspended in a state of timelessness due to their abstraction that is rich in historical reference and outside the rapidly shifting visual language of stylized contemporary aesthetics.

Informed by the landscapes of the American rural West Coast and the proximity to vast expanses of nature, Broel's work invites viewers to consider the impact of the rhythms of nature on the health of the psyche by providing a space of reflection for viewers when experiencing his work.

Squire Broel is a Walla Walla based artist whose practice includes sculpture, painting, drawing and performance. Broel received his BFA from Seattle Pacific University. He has exhibited nationally and internationally, including exhibitions in Canada, Vietnam, China and Indonesia. His work is in numerous collections including the Brooklyn Museum, Los Angeles County Museum, Whitman College and the City of Walla Walla.

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the oddville press

Promoting today's geniuses and tomorrow's giants.

W W W . O D D V I L L E P R E S S . C O M

S T A F F

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D I S C L A I M E R

For some reason, since the nineteenth century, it has been perfectly normal in Western culture to write about murder, violence, cannibalism, drug-taking and other terrifying experiences without putting in a disclaimer. But ordinary, everyday experiences, such as being naked, using swear words or having sexual intercourse, are considered unsuitable for impressionable children. Odd though the Oddville Press has always been, we think it wise to adhere to convention in this case, so parental discretion is advised. The Oddville Press considers a wide variety of literary work. Nothing is included purely for its shock value, but sometimes, good art is a little shocking. This book is aimed at adults. This is not the same as “adult content”: it means content for actual grown-ups who are actually mature. If you aren’t an actual grown-up then please don’t read the Oddville Press, or at least, don’t complain to us if you do.

Thanks for reading,
The Management

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Middle Place

Tom Montag

We who are of this middle place
find ourselves at the edge of things.
There is always something under
the rock. We don't ever know what.
The sun at midday here stacks our
shadows beneath us and darkness
even as we lift the rock to find
the nothingness which awaits us.
Do not think too much what it might
mean. The rock, I mean. I mean darkness
in this middle place where wind blows
the ends of our tethered hope.

*Tom Montag is most recently the author of *In This Place: Selected Poems 1982-2013*. He is a contributing writer at Verse-Virtual and in 2015 was the featured poet at Atticus Review (April) and Contemporary American Voices (August). Other poems are found at Hamilton Stone Review, The Homestead Review, Little Patuxent Review, Mud Season Review, Poetry Quarterly, Provo Canyon Review, Third Wednesday, and elsewhere.*



Dandelion

Brian Michael Barbeito

Brian Michael Barbeito is a Canadian writer and photographer. Current work appears in Contemporary Verse 2 (CV2), and Fiction International.

Calliope

Bradley Kerstetter

PETER DIDN'T WANT to get out of his Brownstone recliner—a three-thousand dollar Italian leather pushback that he bought for four hundred from a guy in a gravel parking lot—let alone go to the damn store. A yacht among dories, he sat docked in his living room next to his oak-veneer particle board coffee table, and a sagging seventies era yellow-vinyl sofa. What he wanted was to stay captain of his tiny island of luxury, keep watching the Blazers, and pluck away at his unplugged electric bass while nursing his hangover with another Schlitz.

A commercial with a talking green lizard came on, then another with a quacking white duck and a chimpanzee jumping up and down on an old sedan. Christy entered the living room with their crying daughter in her outstretched arms as though she were a bottle of nitroglycerine. Words shot from Christy's mouth in machine gun bursts.

Peter slumped into his chair and ignored her because, well, the ball game was back on. Blazers vs. Houston. He put his bass down to watch.

"Did you not hear me?" Christy barked, stepping between Peter and the game—a bold move, not unlike getting between a bear and its moose carcass. She must've been banking on Peter being too hungover to make any

sudden movements, though by the shift of Rachel to her hip and extension of her hand straight out like a traffic cop, you could tell she was taking no chances. All she lacked was a whistle.

If Christy's previous words were small arms fire, then her next word was a bomb.

"Peter!"

His tan and white tabby—curled in his lap—jumped, skedaddling before she landed. The baby wailed. Peter slunk-hunkered into his Brownstone looking for shelter. Halfway into his third morning beer, the fire of his hangover-headache had begun to subside, but now he felt the re-fanning of flames searing at his brow.

Last night hadn't gone well. His band, The Botch, had played The Red Monkey. All of twenty patrons showed, half of which were too drunk to listen, the other half only waiting for the headline band, Bunkhead. Then the titty bar afterwards. It was a mistake going out with Roscoe and Mitch. Those guys weren't married. What the fuck did they know? Couple of dudes whose frontal lobes were definitely not fully developed. That's what Christy would say anyway. She was always talking about how men's brains don't fully form until forty, how they act like goddamn teenagers in potbelly bodies.

No, let's get real. The mistake was this 'full catastrophe,' as Zorba the Greek would have said. Marriage, a kid, a house. Before all that Peter had been playing bass in a slacker grunge band called, Mr. Muddle, the musical style of which was once described as '...abstract, absurd, and awesome.' He was carefree, with the kind of hubris and confidence that made him believe the world actually gave a damn. Figured the posters of Uncle Sam pointing a finger were explicitly made for him. That he alone could prevent forest fires. And then, as a result of his youthful misconceptions, his younger brother was in an accident, a double leg amputee.

A few months later he fell into Christy, her waterfall of blonde hair behind which you could have hidden from the police during a drug buy gone bad, if that sort of thing happened to you. Her sinfully soft skin made Peter want to rub her all over him as if she were the magic lotion that could rid him of responsibility for his brother's accident. That Christy was nurturing, the type attracted to fixer-uppers, only made it easier.

"Will you get off your ass and get me a goddamned diaper!" Christy yelled, wide-eyed, brow-popping.

Peter was confused. Should he get up or should he stay seated? Clearly, Christy's words told him to get up, but her outstretched stiff-arm told him to stay. Not one to over analyze things, especially with a throbbing temple, he heeded her body language rather than her words. After all, people don't always mean what they say. Peter shifted side-to-side in his seat, trying to look past her as though she were just an exuberant fan.

"Peter!" another explosion.

A hand to his forehead, an attempt to smother the fiery bursting of his hangover, he tried to speak, his lips even pursed with words,

but nothing came out. Besides, the argument that he was going to make—that the Blazers were down by two with ten to go—would have meant nothing to her. Like speaking programming code for all she would have understood or cared.

Careful not to capsize, Peter leaned left. He knew this wasn't about getting a diaper. For fuck sake, she was perfectly capable of getting a diaper herself. No, this was about something else. Maybe it was about last night when he stumbled in at three in the morning and woke Christy up looking for sloppy spouse-sex. Or, maybe it was about this morning when he hurled god-knows-what over the side of the bed.

There were no more timeouts—this was the last play and Peter wanted a good view. He stood and tried to look around Christy. No dice. He shuffled right. Christy mirrored his movements to block his view. Shuffled left. Still, no good. Peter, in desperation, mustered the energy to juke right, and cut left. For a moment he had a clear unobstructed view of the game—Damian in the corner for a—.

"Shit!"

Involuntarily, Peter jerked his head to Christy. Rachel had gone Chernobyl. Brown goo geysered out, gushing onto Christy's smock, and fell like some sort of toxic napalm to the carpet.

"Wow," he said.

"Shit!"

"Yes, shit." Peter turned back to the TV but the game had gone to commercial. It was over and he had missed it.

"Will you—!"

"Get you a diaper?" Peter finished, and made for the hall closet, his hangover breaking containment, engulfing his body. He opened the closet door. Nothing. Nada. No diapers to be found. Not a one.

"We're all out," he yelled with the

smoothness of a sheet of sandpaper.

"Are you shitting me?"

No but your daughter is, and if he'd made one good decision that day it was the decision not to voice that thought. Especially since he was the one responsible for keeping the diapers stocked.

"I thought you said you ordered a new shipment," she continued.

"Well. I was. I mean. I—."

"Jesus H. Christ," Christy interrupted. "Do I have to do everything?"

Peter hung his head. "What do we do?"

"What do we do? You get more damn Huggies is what we do," Christy said.

"Okay," he said and took a deep breath. This was not in his plans. This would require copious amounts of pain killers, another beer, maybe even a bong hit. "Where should I go?"

"I don't know. Not my problem. I have my hands full," she said.

Again, Peter exercised remarkable restraint and did not voice, 'of shit'.

"Okay. Okay. Where are the keys?" he asked.

"The keys to the bike lock are hanging in the garage."

"The Plymouth keys."

Christy snorted. "You think I'm letting you drive?" She pointed to the garage.

"Really?" Peter asked.

"Really."

"It may be a while."

"I'm in no hurry now, am I?" Christy said, her sarcasm dripping only slightly less than her smock.

Goddamn, he thought. Peter went to the fridge for another beer. They don't ride bikes in Houston. Or Atlanta. Or Bismark. Only in fucking Portland—where twenty somethings' come to retire and take over the goddamn streets with their bikes.

More for psychological help in containing the spread of his hangover than for any sense of safety, Peter looked for his bike helmet, but all he could find was his baseball batting helmet. The compress of foam comforted his head in a reassuring, nothing-will-burst-into-flames sort of way.

He climbed onto his beach cruiser, but the back tire was flat as road kill snake. Maybe the tire was just low on air. After all, it'd been June since he last rode. And now it was what? October? No, he remembered Halloween, so it must be November. The overcast and drizzle supported this theory. This was not his beloved sunny California homeland. This was Portland, where come October people fumbled through their medicine cabinets looking for prescription painkillers, sleep-aids, rat poison.

Peter pumped up the tire, quite certain he would not be able to negotiate a tire change. He crossed his fingers, and squeezed the side-wall. To further test the tire he sat sideways on the seat. Was that a hiss? He concluded it was only an airy noise in his brain. The tire seemed firm. Firm enough. So with the confidence of a man whose firmest thing in life was his half-pumped tire, he kicked off down his driveway in search of diapers for his baby girl.

Most of the time he considered Rachel with ambivalence at best. Other times, especially when she was having a meltdown at three in the morning, he wanted to throw her out the second story bedroom window and be done with it. But then he'd have to pick up the pieces. And he'd cleaned up enough pieces in his lifetime. Better just to take her out to the dumpster, or better yet, sell her on the black market. At least get some money out of it. Oh what shitty thoughts! I mean, who thinks like that, right? But all it does is shits, screams, and sleeps. He tried when Christy was around to

feign interest with a little coochy-coo-peeka-boo, but he didn't know what to do with this thing!

Turning onto Clairemont Avenue a cool breeze brushed the inside of his thighs, tickling his testicles. He was wearing only his baby blue bathrobe. Damn.

His head hanging down over his handlebars, he thought to turn back to the house and put on some clothes, but when he glanced over his shoulder he found there was going to be no turning around. It came on like a tidal wave. Bikes flooded the block, filling in around him. Peter tried to out-pedal this, this, whatever-it-was bike parade, but a fixed-gear beach cruiser was not meant to out-pedal anything.

"Hey! It's the Dude!" a biker yelled.

"The Dude!" someone else yelled.

Peter, frightened and unsettled by the sudden onslaught of bikes, the shouting, the loud, pounding music, gripped his handlebars tightly, afraid he might wobble off the road. There must have been nearly a hundred people riding all sorts of contraptions. A guy to his right sat ten feet high on a double-decker bike, one frame welded on top another. In front of him a woman wearing ass-tight pink spandex had an enormous old-school boom box strapped to her bike rack, the speakers blaring—no, make that blasting—Prince's Purple Rain. To his left he saw what he would have described later, had he remembered it, as a bar on wheels. It looked as if a group of drinkers at a pub had concluded that they should just take the bar-top with them: nine people pedaled this bar-on-wheels (four on either side faced three beer taps, while one person steered). In front of each person sat a beer mug.

"Which way you going, Dude?" the man on the double-decker shouted down to him.

"I don't know. I'm looking for Huggies," Peter said, repeating what he had been told.

He really had no idea where he was going. He and Christy lived in a desert of residential homes and it seemed the only store within a two-mile radius was a UPS. It was one of the reasons they ordered diapers online. Peter was just planning on riding around until he happened on a convenience store or a group of box stores.

"You're in luck. There's a guy back there that's got some."

"Really?"

"Yo Harley! bring up the Hugs," Double-Decker shouted behind him.

A man riding a bike configured with long handlebars and chopper-style forks sprinted up. His hair was slicked back. He had bushy sideburns and his arms were heavily tattooed. He reached into his shirt pocket, pulled out a couple small blue pills, and extended his hand over. Peter opened his left palm and Harley dropped the pills in.

"What do I do with these?" Peter asked.

"I know. I know. Sorry, they're the last two I got," Harley said sheepishly and pedaled forward, pressing a button on his handlebars that made a motorcycle engine-chop sound.

Peter looked at Double-D. "Will they get rid of my hangover?"

"Damn straight. And so much more. The Dude needs a beer!" Double-D yelled over to the bicycle bar. Peter looked back to his left and a man appeared on a bike holding a beer for him. Peter steered his bike with his right hand and held the two pills with his left. He didn't really want the pills, but he really wanted the beer and the only way he could think to grab the beer was to free his hand of the pills. About to toss them over his shoulder when something buzzed his head, buzzed again, then hovered in front of him. A hummingbird. It must have considered Peter's baby blue robe the mother lode of all nectar. A thin high

whistle. The kind of whistle that felt like a hundred needles spearing into the tender base of your skull. A blood-red gorget on its throat. It was a Calliope Hummingbird. No mistaking, and Peter watched it porpoise away.

The ensuing image hit him like a bullet to the brain.

He'd avoided this certain cerebral penetration associated with the hummingbird for a good couple of years. Sure, the image came whizzing by now and then, occasionally even grazing his scalp, and he saw the tracers, the constant collateral damage.

They'd been drinking on the train tracks near their house, and decided to play chicken with a speeding locomotive, when his little bro slipped on the last rail. Even over the locomotive's wailing whistle, Peter heard the thud and disintegration of his brother's legs. Spent the next few days under the haze of the L.A. pollution, picking up pieces. One foot here, one knee cap there, the other foot with the brand new track shoe for his high school team still on, until finally he had most of his brother's lower body put back together like a puzzle with a few missing pieces. Many times over the next few weeks as Peter sat in the tracks, the hummingbird came back to hover over the big red blotch that even he—who didn't know the difference between a seagull and a songbird—had figured out was called a Calliope. It wasn't until the winter rains washed the blotch clean that it stopped coming, and Peter could even begin to comprehend the power of an older brother. How a younger brother would follow anywhere.

He met Christy a month later.

In an effort to dislodge the image of his brother's broken body, Peter pinched his cheek, whacking his forehead against the hand holding the pills.

"Do you want the beer or not?" asked the

man riding the bike next to him. Peter looked at the pills with renewed interest, thought about what Double-D said, "and so much more." He popped the pills in his mouth, reached over for the beer, and swigged and swallowed.

The marine layer lifted, and the sun burned through the remaining thin veil of clouds. The fire in his forehead, and the image of his brother gone now, replaced by a sort of euphoria-of-relief that caused him to involuntarily smile a shit-eating grin. It seemed to Peter that everyone else was grinning back at him too, as if he'd been transported to some parallel universe of smiley people.

He'd forgotten what he had set out to do. All he knew was that this, this—whatever the fuck this was—was what he was doing. He didn't know exactly where he was or how long he'd been gone, only that he'd ridden the amount of time it took for him to drink another beer, and given how fast and easy the first one had slid down his throat, he figured not far. And that the street numbers were getting smaller: they were headed down to the river. He knew that much.

It seemed this pedaling palooza gathered power as it rolled along, becoming more salient, expanding, enveloping everyone that entered its snaking serpentine form. There were hundreds of cyclists and it was a couple blocks long now, disrupting traffic as it slithered its way through the city. Peter was energized as if he were tapped directly into the energy of this palooza.

As it neared the Willamette, the head of the snaking parade veered abruptly left along Industrial Avenue, and slid into a large paved lot behind an abandoned warehouse. Here, the tongue of the parade forked and formed a circle. A man wearing a top hat and a black tailcoat, riding a unicycle veered off into the

center and wheeled in tight circles. He lit a bottle rocket and let it shoot from his hand into the sky. His fists rose above his head in defiance or celebration. Peter did not know. The crowd cheered. Not a cloud in the sky.

"What's up?" Peter asked.

A guy sitting on a tricycle with red, white, and blue streamers hanging from the handlebar-ends turned to him. He was sporting an untrimmed beard, and wore a red and white flannel shirt. "Chariot races," he said. He put on a hockey helmet and mask, hefted a metal garbage can lid in one hand and a lance-like looking object in the other, letting out a primal roar. Peter wasn't sure how Mr. Red White and Blue was going to steer his trike, and thought to point this out, but before he could say anything, Harley, the chopper-biker skidded next to him.

"Dude! let's go. You and me!"

Peter nodded his head—an action that didn't necessarily mean to convey agreement. But at this juncture in Peter's six-beered-blue-pilled-euphoria he would have nodded his head to a man wearing a black hood, and holding a double-sided axe. Peter smiled at Harley. Harley smiled at Peter.

"Hop in the back, Dude," Harley said pointing to a toddler trailer now attached to his bike. The trailer, vaguely reminiscent, triggered a notion that there was something else he needed to do. Someone pulled a catcher's mask over Peter's helmet, and handed him a plywood shield. They stuck a baseball bat in his hand. Notion gone.

"What are the rules?" Peter asked.

"Rules? bludgeon your opponents out of their trailer and be the last person riding," Harley said. "Those are the rules. Now quick, get in."

Peter squished into the trailer, knees pressed against his chest, and Harley pedaled

them to the center of the parking lot.

"Let the games begin!" the man on the unicycle shouted.

Harley and Peter charged off.

That Peter was the last man standing wasn't testament to any great chariot fighting prowess. It was one of those moments that didn't seem to follow—a sort of non sequitur of action. It may simply have been a matter of relativity: that his body viewed the varied impacts of bike, trailer, fist, and lance as mere annoyances compared to the searing pain in his head earlier, before the little blue pills. Ahh, the little blue pills. The so called, Huggies. Maybe, coupled with a fountain of beer there was just the right proportion of mind-number and kick-ass to trigger a reactionary rebound response to his brother's accident, causing his physical abilities to shift from molasses-like to something more cougar-ish. Whatever the reason, this perfect storm of events resulted in unfortunate consequences for the other contestants.

Peter stood victorious at the center of the circle amid a wasteland of bruised bodies, broken trailers, bent rims, and splintered lances. The crowd hushed, waiting. Peter dropped his bat and thrust both fists into the air. As he did, his sash loosened, and a gust of wind thrust the wraps of his robe behind him like a cape.

He was fully exposed.

The crowd cheered and rushed Peter. He tried to wrap his robe back around, but the crowd collapsed on him, a hundred hands hefting him to the air, carrying him, chanting, "Du-ude, Du-ude." The excitement and the tiny up-and-down thrusts of the crowd caused Peter's penis to rise like the dead from the grave. Floating on the crowd, he closed his eyes, in an unfamiliar catharsis of being.

Peter still thought he was floating when he opened his eyes. He lay on the ground in the

middle of an empty parking lot, the sky overcast. He needed to take a leak, so he rolled to his side, shoving himself up to his knees. A homeless man pushed a grocery cart full of aluminum cans towards him. Peter turned around for a bit of privacy, urinated, then stood with his penis in his palm, listening to the grinding churn of a freight train coming across Steel Bridge.

"You all right?" the homeless man asked, the rattle of cart and cans interrupting Peter's reverie. "My tent is just under the bridge if you need a place to ride it out."

Peter shook his head, wrapping his robe around him.

"Suit yourself," the man said, picking up an empty and tossing it in the cart. He continued his slow, rattling progression towards the bridge.

Peter found his bike leaning up against the side of a brick building, the rear tire flat. He abandoned it and walked east on Burnside, away from the Willamette. A bike and toddler trailer passed him and it was then he remembered the diapers. The fucking Huggies. What had he been doing? Two blocks later he came upon a Plaid Pantry. At the counter with his package of Huggies, he couldn't find his wallet. He told the clerk, "I'm taking these," and walked out the store.

By the time Peter ambled up the steps to his front door he'd been walking for a couple of hours. It was drizzling, nearing dark. He equivocated, couldn't really remember why he'd been gone all these hours. He considered knocking as a way to express that something had gone wrong. But had something gone wrong? These were his ponderings when he heard the buzz, and felt the pins and needles in the back of his skull. He turned around, leaning with his back against the door. A Calliope hovered a mere foot from his face, its wings rapidly beating back and forth in a figure eight.

Oh, you little shit, Peter thought and tried to snatch it with his free hand. The Calliope dodged backwards, turning its head to eye Peter. Peter tried to snatch it again, and then the door opened and he fell into his house. Christy stood holding the door, Peter at her feet. It smelled of soiled clothes, garlic and onion. She threw up her hands and shook her head.

"Fucking typical," she said. "I send you out to do one simple thing."

Peter triumphantly thrust up the package of diapers. "I got the damn diapers," he said. "What more do you want?"

Christy stared blankly at him. "You're right, what more could I want?" Christy asked. "What more could I possibly want?"

"All right, all right," Peter said, thinking fast. "I saw an old friend. We had a couple beers. So kill me."

Christy rolled her eyes. She snatched the diapers, and went through the kitchen.

Peter collapsed into his Brownstone. Family Guy was on and he caught the last ten minutes of it. The light had evaporated out the living room window. Rain streaked the glass. Peter switched the channel to South Park. The flicker of TV like a back-alley lamp.

Christy reappeared carrying two plastic trays of pasta, handed one to Peter, and sat down on the yellow vinyl couch. A commercial came on: a squirrel floating through a party, holding helium balloons in one hand and a bottle of antidiarrheal in the other.

"What is it?" Peter asked, picking at the pasta with his fork.

"Stouffer's," Christy said. "What are we watching?"

"End of South Park." Another commercial with a camel in an office. It asked, "Guess what day it is? Guess what day it is? Huh? Anybody?"

"Hump day," Peter said. He turned to

Christy and winked.

Christy, expressionless, took a bite of her Stouffer's.

"You feel that?" Peter asked.

"Feel what?"

"That shaking. It feels like the house is shaking."

"I don't feel anything."

"No, really. You feel that? It's like there's a freight train about to hit the house."

Christy put her plate down on the cushion next to her. She stood up facing him. "I said I don't feel anything. I don't feel a goddamned thing."

"Yeah, you're right," Peter said, stabbing at his Stouffer's. "I don't feel it anymore either."

Brad Kerstetter is a stay-at-home father/builder/writer. When he is not tearing apart walls, rewiring, and rebuilding his fixer-upper, then he is tearing apart sentences and rebuilding paragraphs. If he is not doing either of those things, then he is probably chasing his kids down the streets of Portland, Oregon.

Watching the Sky for Rain (during those days of horror)

Angela Williamson Emmert

The sky turned the dusty blue of rainstorms coming towards or moving away and I watched three times as showers circled from the west to south to east and each time I said we will not eat we will not eat and we watched the sky and when my husband said it is raining over there I answered him that this storm had already abandoned us so we deepened the hole where the boys went for water and I cursed the empty sky and cursed the boys and cursed him too even when he held out his hand to comfort me as if it were my failure he forgave me like when the bugs infested the last of the flour and I sat on the floor and bawled and he patted my back and watched as I swept it all up and threw it away and we waited a month for the oats we can eat this? he asked and I laughed at him and roasted the root of Queen Anne's Lace ground for coffee, long ago during a war and we drink it now before dawn and he watches me like looking for rain and I all alone keep my eyes on the clouds.

*Angela Williamson Emmert lives in rural Wisconsin with her husband and sons. Her poetry has appeared in Atticus Review, Grey Sparrow Journal, and Star*Line Journal.*



Reflection Pool

Hollie Savage

Hollie Savage is a photographer from the scenic Puget Sound region of Western Washington. Hollie is a mother of three who manages a family business.

Shirley O'Reilly's Top 5 Reasons to Never Throw Away an Orphaned Sock

Jeff Nazzaro

FATHER BERNARD WROTE A BOOK on happiness. It must be out of print by now, but at the time I thought it was just wonderful. I loved it so much I donated my signed copy to Goodwill a week after Father's happiness talk because I knew someone would come across it for a song and a dance and it would absolutely change their life. I won't sit here and pretend it changed mine, but my life didn't need much changing to begin with.

Back when Father wrote the book he flew all the way out to Fort Collins, Colorado to meet with his publisher and then he gave a talk at Regis College in Denver because one of his friends from his seminary days was some kind of higher-up out there, like a dean or a provost, and you know all those Jesuits stick together, even though Father always liked to tell us, "You know what they say: If you've met one Jesuit, you've met one Jesuit."

When he got back from his book tour he gave all us ladies his happiness talk. We gathered in the church basement like we did every month with Sister Mary Frances. She always had the altar boys set up metal folding chairs for us, which was so much better than sitting on that thin thin brown carpeting they had down there. Sometimes there was a guest speaker and this time the guest speaker was

our own pastor, Father Bernard, and he gave us the very same talk he gave those Jesuit higher-ups out at Regis College in the Mile High City.

First he told us a little story that happened to him on the plane that I thought was wonderful, which was that on his way back from Denver he was sitting next to this man and after the stewardess had brought everyone their drinks, the man turned to Father and said, "What racket you in?" I thought that was too much. The man had a suit and tie on and Father was wearing his collar, only he had his Members Only jacket zipped up to the neck because you know how it gets chilly on those airplanes. This guy who asked Father what racket he was in was some kind of salesman, so he really went in for this type of small talk. Father said it made the guy happy because it gave him a chance to just be a human being and have a simple interaction without always worrying about closing a deal, but I thought, a guy like that never stops working and if he didn't think he could make a sale to some nice older man sitting next to him on an airplane then he was actively studying up for the next sucker in line. A guy like that is almost never thrown for a loss, but Father said when he zipped down his jacket a bit and told him he

was a priest the guy spluttered out this sort of half-baked apology. Father told him not to worry about it because the priesthood was like any other racket and the important thing was how you conducted yourself no matter what it was you did. I thought that was rather nifty of him, though I would have added something like, "Unless you're a hitman or something, in which case you shouldn't do it at all because it's just plain wrong."

Father began his talk for real and he started by asking all of us a question: "What makes you happy?"

Right away, Marcia DiStefano shot her hand in the air and before Father could even call on her said, "Dancing. Dancing makes me happy."

"Come on," Father said, "if you suddenly lost everything in your life but your stereo and your Saturday Night Fever soundtrack, you'd just slap a record on the turntable and dance the blues away?"

I thought that was great. I'm sure none of us meant to laugh like we did at what must have seemed like Marcia's expense, but Father Bernard busting off with Saturday Night Fever was too much. We all had the album at home. The movie was good, too: "My hair, my hair, don't wreck my hair. I spend all my time working on my hair."

Father waited until we'd settled down, then he looked us all right in the eye and said, "What really makes you happy?"

He picked Marcia to answer first. That was nice of him. Such a nice man.

She looked around, gave a little sniffle and said, "My family."

Mary Gagne said, "My children."

From the back I heard, "vacations" and "Christmas" and "my garden."

Joan Reardon said, "Whenever anyone I know or anyone they know has a baby. Babies

make me happy."

"Money," someone else said. We all laughed and made little side comments on that.

And then I realized I hadn't heard Shirley O'Reilly's voice. That was odd. To my right I heard a throat clear. Here it comes, I thought. But it wasn't Shirley. It was Ruth Antonelli. She said in her quiet little voice, "Routine."

Father put down his coffee cup. "How so?" he said.

Ruth said, "I just like things to be the same. Of course I like going on vacation. I like holidays. I like money." We all laughed. "Even though those things do make me a bit crazy." We all laughed some more, though not as loudly. "But lately my husband has been getting home later and later." Some of the ladies nodded. I didn't, even though I felt like I hadn't seen my husband at normal dinner time since "Stayin' Alive" hit number one. Father just listened. I liked that. "I don't think anything," Ruth continued. "I know he's working, and I'm thankful for everything he does for us, but when he used to come home at the same time every day I would watch my soap, the kids would get home from school, I'd start supper and then my husband would come home. I felt much happier. Routine makes me happy."

Now we were getting somewhere, and we all had something nice to say to Ruth and each other and none of us could wait to hear what Father Bernard had to say about that and how different it was from rocking around the Christmas tree with Marcia DiStefano. None of us, that is, except for Shirley O'Reilly, who took advantage of the lull to start blurbing out one of her "Keys to Happiness," as if she'd been the one who'd written a book on the subject and hadn't heard a word poor little Ruth Antonelli had just said.

I thought, you know what would make me happy right now? If Father Bernard told Shirley, after she started in on saving that one orphaned sock you always find after folding the laundry, “Oh, come on,” like he had with Marcia DiStefano’s silly dancing. If there was anyone who could stick a sock in old Shirley’s “it,” it was Father Bernard, God bless him.

Father went and fixed himself a second cup of coffee, which I wasn’t sure he should have, considering his high blood pressure, and grabbed one of Marcia’s brownies. That I couldn’t blame him for. I was dying for one myself. So rich. But while he indulged on a brownie, we got:

Shirley O’Reilly’s Top 5 Reasons to Never Throw Away an Orphaned Sock

5. Inevitably, the second you throw away an orphaned sock, its twin miraculously reappears, like in that story in the Bible.

(I didn’t know what story she could possibly mean and I’d never heard her say that part about the Bible before, but what were we supposed to know about the Bible, being Catholics. In any case, I knew Shirley had just slipped that in to sound good to Father and keep from pausing for even a second so no one could stop her.)

4. At some point another sock of the same style and color will turn up orphaned as well and voila, you now have a brand new pair of socks instead of being down two pair—that’s sound home economics.

(I was going to say, “I guess you never took much math in high school,” but I was never any good at math, either, so I kept my mouth shut.)

3. Same as No. 2 except for loose elastic openings and holes in toes and heels—and who in this day and age still darns socks?

(I do, I thought, and you can go ahead and stick your darned socks in your loose elastic

opening—no, I take that back, I would never think anything like that, certainly not in the church, even the basement.)

2. Use it for a duster, then throw it back in the wash and use it again.

(I thought, if she goes off on one of her tangents about light versus heavy cleaning—or God forbid how to find something you’ve misplaced, not lost but misplaced because lost is lost—I’m going off on a tangent of my own and I will hurl the very chair beneath my ass in her general direction like that time those skin-heads had a riot on Geraldo. But she didn’t. She stopped and took a sharp little breath and I watched her eyes widen and in that moment I knew what was coming. I knew and I prayed: Please God, don’t let her say it, and if I had been upstairs in the church I would have dropped a quarter in the box and lit a candle for Saint Jude, but it was inevitable, so I pursed my lips as hard as I could, grit my teeth, shut my eyes and waited for the words...)

1. Sock puppets!

(Side note, in case you were wondering, here are, and trust me, I heard them enough times to just about know them:

Shirley O’Reilly’s Top 5 Rules for Finding Something You’ve Misplaced

5. Put your glasses on—unless it’s your glasses you’re looking for, in which case say an extra prayer to Saint Anthony.

4. Say a little prayer to Saint Anthony—because you probably forgot to before putting on your glasses.

3. Turn on the lights and open the blinds—there’s a reason they’re called blinds, you know—unless you’re looking for your brassiere, in which case just turn on the lights.

2. Look everywhere twice because sometimes you imagine looking in a place and count that as looking without ever having actually looked there, and sometimes you look in a

place but don't find the thing, except it's really there, and then you don't look there again because you already looked once. But don't look more than twice because then you're just being silly.

I. Move stuff around.

(It used to make me nuts when Shirley would go off on a tangent like that. Move stuff around, my foot. If you're losing so much stuff you have to move other stuff around just to find the stuff you've lost, you probably have too much stuff to begin with. No, you have to throw stuff away.))

All Father Bernard did after Shirley finally shut herself up was chuckle and say, "I guess someone has it figured out."

We all laughed, even Shirley. I think Father had just wanted to finish his brownie. He did then speak to us on happiness and faith and love and forgiveness and giving to others. It was a wonderful talk. He had so many facts and figures showing how religious people—truly religious I mean, not just those who went around saying they were, or I know, spiritual, and then never set foot inside a church—were generally happier than other people, but that didn't mean anything to each one of us right there because we all had to find our own individual happiness through God and that in turn would make all those around us happier and we'd get rewarded back in the form of more of our own personal happiness. And then he told us to stop for a moment and think about what really made us happy. He didn't even ask anyone to say anything but Marcia DiStefano raised her hand and blurted out, "Family. Family makes me happy," I guess because Father hadn't said anything the first time she'd said it.

"Of course family makes you happy," he said. "But what really makes you happy?"

I love that man, I really do.

When I got home that afternoon I took

a nap. I know I took a nap because I always took naps after spending time with the ladies. The rest I remember so clearly. When I woke up I called my sister at work and started to tell her about Father's book and his talk and about Shirley O'Reilly hijacking the proceedings, but I only got a little ways into it before she said she had to go because she was at work. Work never stopped her when she woke me up from a nap to tell me about her latest spat with Pat Shimkus in bookkeeping, but never mind. I was halfway through this juicy antebellum romance novel that was just starting to get good and before I knew it the kids would be home from school and I'd have to think about getting supper ready. It was getting dark so early and Christmas was right around the corner. I hated it, really. All that extra work. Decorating and shopping and wrapping presents and then of course dinner at my house again. Just like Thanksgiving. I never complained, but my sister could have at least offered.

I got so engrossed in the novel I completely forgot to take something out for supper. I just kept waiting for this horrible slave owner who liked to sleep with all his male slaves, even though he had a beautiful blonde wife, to find some kind of redemption, like that old sea captain who wrote "Amazing Grace." He just seemed so miserable. A few months ago I pulled it off the shelf and reread it and let me tell you that man never did find redemption. In the end those slaves tore him to pieces with their bare hands but not before the biggest slave, the one the blonde wife was really in love with, you-know-whatted the slave owner up the you-know-where with the red-hot branding iron.

The kids and I had hot dogs and SpaghettiOs for supper that night. When my husband got home I made him a sandwich and he ate it in front of the TV with an entire bag of potato

chips and four beers. I told him he should have a handful of chips and one beer, but right away he went off on a tangent about work. He almost never watched football on Monday nights because he got up so early for work, but the Patriots were playing.

I sat and did my needlepoint and more than once I thought it would really make me happy if Howard Cosell would stick a sock in it and I knew I wasn't alone. And then Howard gave us the terrible news about John Lennon. I dropped my needlepoint and swore: "God-dammit. Goddammit, no." My husband said something like, "Geez, that's too bad," and then he said a lot of nasty things about the Dolphins and their coach, who looked like a nice enough man, and how they deserved to lose, then got upset because another Englishman named John had his silly field goal blocked. He never thought I paid much attention to those games, but what else was there to do when they were on? I pretended I didn't care too much about poor John Lennon, either, but I fought back the tears. It was so sad, like when I was a papergirl delivering the afternoon edition of the Sun the day after Buddy Holly died, covering all those doorsteps with all that bad news. And how cold out it was. That Sunday, Father Bernard talked in his sermon about John

Lennon and how he said we should all imagine a peaceful world without material possessions, which I thought was wonderful, but he didn't mention that part about imagining a world with no religion.

The game went into overtime, but it was so late and I was so stunned, even more stunned after Howard told us again about John Lennon, I just sat there, numb, and then the Patriots lost. I hated when they showed the losing team on the sideline. I always felt bad for them. I would have felt bad for the Dolphins if they had been the ones who'd lost and they'd showed them. As much as I'd prayed to Saint Raymond of Peñafort that they'd get that crook Nixon, I felt bad for him the day he resigned.

Lying in bed, I thought about telling my husband about Father Bernard's book and his talk, but that wouldn't have been a good idea, not then especially, and anyway I'd already told the kids. It was a good lesson for them. My favorite part was, "Dancing. Dancing makes me happy." The kids laughed and Sue, my oldest, said she really didn't like Mrs. DiStefano, or Bobby DiStefano, for that matter. I told her she shouldn't say things like that and anyway that wasn't the point of the story. I suppose I shouldn't have told them at all, but pardon my French it made me happy as hell.

Jeff Nazzaro's work has appeared in Angel City Review, Flash: The International Short-short Story Magazine, Bareback Literary Magazine, Rind and Every Day Fiction and is forthcoming in Down in the Dirty Magazine and ClockwiseCat.



American Gothic

Luke Haynes

A chance encounter with a box of fabric remnants sparked Mr. Haynes' imagination. Mr. Haynes developed a system to piece manageable parts into a larger whole, applying a modern design sense to a familiar process. He uses reclaimed materials from the communities he works with in his projects to speak with the textile language of the area. www.lukehaynes.com

Age Before Beauty

Jamie Haddox

He buys his place in the
overwrought nests where
bed-hips crow like orioles.
Those mannequin hands
always praying over the
opiates like a last supper
serving, rushing beneath
thin skin, the maneater
nurse cherrypicks an
asserting bitch tone, steals
opal rings, opens jars, an
open house before open
heart surgery, a flick of
the blade, the surgeon nods.
This only proves that God
cooks on boiling blacktop
skillets, the blood climbing
up a tube, the gate curses a
coiling board, and the oak
tree craves a few final nails.

Jamie Haddox is a poet from Minnesota. She holds a BA in Creative Writing. Her work has appeared in SunStruck, Haute Dish, Gyroscope, Pretty Owl Poetry and on the Golden Walkman Podcast. In her spare time, Jamie loves engaging in witty banter, Cards Against Humanity, and reading lots of book

Alone in a Japanese Restaurant

Josh Rank

THE FRONT was lined with windows, but the abundant sunshine barely touched the tables along the opposite wall. The restaurants of Little Tokyo were stacked along a winding alley, which provided a lot of shade. Sunshine in Los Angeles is everywhere, so finding a respite was a little refreshing for Abel. The place was probably half-full, with a few businessmen and women taking hurried lunch breaks and a couple tourists. He nervously glanced around and figured himself to be only patron to be on a first date. An electric ding sounded every time someone opened the front door, and it was developing into a Pavlovian trigger of nervousness; a quick yet furtive glance up, followed by disappointment. His knee jumped into the table when his phone started ringing in his pocket. He figured he didn't have much time, but his mother would pitch a fit if he ignored her calls.

"Yes?" he whispered into his phone.

"Are you busy?" She asked this every time she called, not that the answer mattered.

"Yes."

"Oh, okay. Well I was just wondering if you looked at those e-mails I sent you."

"Mom, I don't really have time—"

"Oh I see. So you move out to the big city and all of a sudden you don't have time for

your mother?"

"I answered the phone didn't I? Just like the last fifty times you called me this month?"

"Let's not get dramatic, okay? It's a simple question: Have you looked into the apprenticeship applications I e-mailed to you?"

"I'm doing fine. I don't need them. I told you that."

"The grocery store? Working at a grocery store in your thirties? That's doing fine?"

Abel massaged his forehead with his free hand and let his attention slip from the door for a moment. The familiar exasperation of dealing with his mother overrode the need to examine every new customer for the restaurant. He needed to stay vigilant in case she didn't recognize him from his profile pictures online. Marie. Or Maria. Or Mary. He'd have to check her profile as soon as he was able to get off the phone. This had to go well. He needed to find someone else to talk to besides coworkers and his mother. Through the barrage of statements being hurled at him through the earpiece, the ding of the door caught his attention. He glanced up and immediately tuned out the phone call.

"I gotta go," he said before hanging up.

It wasn't Marie or Maria or Mary that caught his attention. Another business man

with a red tie and a blue suit. His hair looked healthy, styled, but still around the same length as Abel's. He was probably about five-foot-ten, just like Abel. Brown eyes, medium build, clean-shaven, the same as Abel. The way his jaw curved around instead of any hint of angular lines, the slightly bulbous nose, the furry eyebrows and rounded ears, all of it made Abel feel like he was watching himself walk to a table, sit down, flip his tie over his shoulder, and open a menu.

Holy fucking shit, thought Abel. That's me.

He grabbed one of the menus sitting forsaken in front of him and propped it up along the edge of the table. Hiding behind the list of appetizers, he tried to figure out what to do. Should I say something to him? Should I run out of here? What the hell is going on?

And then the door dinged again.

Abel peeked over the top of the menu to see a short girl, shorter than he imagined her, with black hair and a red coat scanning the restaurant. She looked toward the mystery stranger in the tie and smiled. Abel watched as she walked over to the man's table and sat down. He glanced up at her and shrugged. Her head moved a bit and Abel guessed she was introducing herself, probably saying how nice it was to finally meet him. The man sat back, crossed his arms, and said something else. She responded. He shrugged and shook his head.

"Well fine, then!" she screamed before standing up. "Go fuck yourself!" She stormed out of the restaurant and the front door reported a digital ding as she walked back into the waiting sunshine.

The waitress came up to the other man's table, took his order, and left. Abel slowly slid his menu onto the table and took a deep breath. His shaky legs walked him across the restaurant where he grabbed the back of the

chair Marie or Maria or Mary had just been sitting. He pulled it out and sat down.

The man looked up and they locked eyes. Neither said a word. Neither moved for a full minute.

"I don't have time for this," said the man.

A nervous laugh leaked from Abel's mouth. "I mean, like, are you my brother or something? This is ridiculous."

The man looked in the direction of the kitchen and back to Abel. "I don't have any brothers."

"I didn't think so either."

"Yeah well I still don't think so. Who even are you?"

"I'm Abel." He stuck his hand over the table.

The man let it hang there for a few seconds before giving it a light, quick shake. "Stacey."

Abel sat back. "Isn't that a girl's name?"

"For some people." Stacey stared hard into Abel. It felt like he was chastising himself in the mirror. "It comes from Saint Eustace. He was burned to death for refusing to worship the Roman gods. Does that sound feminine to you?"

Stacey sat back like a prosecutor resting his case, but Abel thought the explanation was a little too carefully planned out. He figured Stacey had been giving that same speech for years.

"Listen," said Stacey. "I already had one psycho interrupt my lunch, and I don't have time for another. So if you could just move along, that'd be great."

"I think you're ignoring a pretty glaring fact here, Stacey." Abel fanned his hand between them. "We're the same person." He said this with his eyebrows pulled back and a slight smirk on his face as if explaining an obvious answer to a simple question. "How are you

not freaking out right now?"

The waitress approached from the kitchen and Stacey glanced over, held up his hand, and said, "I'm sorry, but could you just wrap that up to go?" The waitress stopped, sighed, and nodded before turning around.

The smirk on Abel's face started to fade. "Do you want my number? We gotta talk more about this."

"There's nothing to talk about." Stacey fished his credit card from his wallet and handed it to the waitress when she returned with a Styrofoam container in a plastic bag.

"Nothing to talk about?" Abel started to raise his voice. "We are exactly the same!"

"Obviously, we are not exactly the same." The waitress returned with the little black book. Stacey slid his credit card back into his wallet, signed the receipt, and grabbed the plastic bag.

"Wait—"

"Thanks for the scintillating conversation, but I have work to do."

Before Abel could find the words that would make him stop, Stacey walked away from the table and out of the door where a digital ding signified the end of their conversation. The waitress came back to gather the check, and never once tried to take Abel's order.

His phone started to ring as soon as he got back to his apartment. He knew who it was before he looked at it, and took a deep breath.

"Hello," he said into his phone.

"What was so important that you had to hang up on your mother and not call her back?"

He sat on the bed that doubled as a couch in his studio apartment. "Mom, can I ask you something?" He reached over to the laptop sitting on top of the ruffled blanket and turned it on. "How come I never had a brother?"

"What? Where did this come from?" He was listening for hesitation, for nervousness, for any sign that there was something she had kept from him and wanted to remain a secret.

"Like, I don't have a brother, do I?" There were surely more tactical ways to go about the conversation, but Abel didn't have the mental stamina to come up with anything.

"Are you trying to make your mother cry? Trying to make me feel even more lonely than I already do? With your father gone, I don't—"

He lay down on the bed and listened to his mother give him a speech she had perfected by this point. Sure, Abel felt bad for her, but he was the one who lost a father. He thought he had the winning hand, but maybe she was just a better bluffer. Whatever the case, she expressed the loneliness that he himself felt every day. Perhaps it was just recreation for her; if you don't have anything to talk about you might as well not exist, so she was grasping onto the one conversation that didn't have an end. Unfortunately for Abel, being the only child (supposedly), he was the sole sympathizer and therefore the sole recipient of her grief.

Finally, mercifully, she concluded her soliloquy and he was able to gracefully end the call. He thought for a moment, and then sent a text message to his aunt. She answered quickly.

Honey, I was there. Your dad was working a double so I was in the room with her. I don't want to get graphic, but I saw you come out. Alone. Where the heck is this coming from?

Abel slid his phone to the opposite side of the bed. He could answer her later. If Stacey wasn't his brother, then what the hell was going on? He grabbed his laptop and ran a few quick Google searches. There were 7.3 billion people on the Earth. They say no one is the same, but how could they know that for sure? 7.3 billion is such a large number that Abel

could only comprehend it as “a big number.” He couldn’t internalize it. Someone wins the lottery almost every time, and what are the chances of that? The precedent for hitting tiny odds had been set, so was it so unfathomable that he found another person that looked exactly like himself? The most unbelievable part was that he found him in his own city. Sure, Los Angeles has about four million people, so that probably helped. But finding an exact match so close to home, there had to be something else going on. He had always heard that twins have a special connection; feeling each other’s pain, a level of shared intuition, things like that. Was it crazy to think Abel and Stacey shared something on this level? They weren’t twins, he believed that now, but there had to be some connection. They shared an immeasurable bond and that’s what led them to the same city, the same restaurant. And maybe a healthy dose of luck that they happened to be there at the same time.

Sitting alone in his apartment, with no hope for a friendly get-together or a romantic relationship, counting down the minutes until the next time his mother would call him, Abel knew he had to convince Stacey of what he had just figured out: They were connected whether they liked it or not.

A week passed. Abel switched his shifts at the grocery store so he could return to the restaurant in Little Tokyo at noon every day. He would sit by himself at a table along the wall on the opposite side from the windows. Each time the digital ding from the door signified an entrance or exit, he would study the person and try to find his own face. He would eat a simple lunch, usually a California roll and a bowl of miso soup, accompanied by a diligent survey of the customers. He didn’t mention it to his mother, even though she continued to call with frenzied consistency. He

wanted to save the surprise for after he completed his talk with Stacey. The discussion had run through his head countless times, going in different directions each time. He was confident that he could steer the dialogue toward a productive end, now that he had time to prepare. He was overcome with confusing emotions last time. That wouldn’t happen again.

Finally, mercifully, eight days after their initial meeting, Abel was dousing a piece of sushi in soy sauce when he heard the digital ding. He looked up and saw a version of himself being led to a table along the wall of windows. He set the chopsticks down, wiped his mouth, and reached for the fork he had been given in case he didn’t trust his chopstick skills. Before the discussion would be an experiment.

He waited until Stacey had his tie flipped over his shoulder and a firm grip on his menu. Abel slid his plate to the side and put his hand on the table in front of him. With the other hand, he grabbed the fork in a fist. He lined up and turned his head to watch Stacey as he slammed the fork into the meaty portion between his thumb and forefinger. The pain surged through him but the short yelp of pain didn’t come from his side of the restaurant. Stacey had quickly cried out and dropped the menu on the table in front of him. Abel didn’t move, the fork still in his hand, as a smile grew beneath his wide eyes. There it is, he thought. Irrefutable proof that we are entwined. He pulled his glance away from Stacey and looked at his hand. About a quarter inch of the fork had disappeared into the skin, and blood was slowly escaping from the holes. He pulled the fork out and wrapped his hand in the cloth napkin that had a couple dabs of soy sauce from earlier.

“I told you!” he said before he reached Stacey’s table.

Stacey looked up, still holding his hand. He shook his head and rolled his eyes. "I am never coming here again."

"Look!" Abel held up his hand. "I stabbed myself with a fork and you felt the pain. We are connected. I don't know how and I don't know why, but we are."

"This?" Stacey held up his hand. "I have carpal tunnel. I type a lot at work."

Abel sat down. "Do you hate it when it's raining but the sun is still out?"

Stacey continued rubbing his hand but didn't say anything.

"Do you wear socks to bed?"

Another moment of silence, but slowly, almost imperceptibly, Stacey shook his head.

"Do you get fidgety when sitting in a movie theater?"

Lightly, Stacey nodded.

"Would you rather freeze or burn to death?"

A moment later, Stacey said, "Burn."

Abel smiled. "Because it's quicker?"

"You don't get oxygen so you'd pass out. It's either a quick flash of pain or a long dull pain."

Abel nodded. "Exactly." He couldn't believe how well this was going.

"Listen," said Stacey. "I don't know what your deal is, but I don't know you. Okay? Just because we have a few similarities doesn't mean we have some telepathic connection. It's just a coincidence. In all honesty, I think it'd be better if you just went back to your table and left me alone."

Abel couldn't believe it. He sat back in his chair and for the first time, became aware of the dull throb in his hand.

"Coincidence? We look exactly the same. We both hate socks. We both want to burn to death. How can you ignore all of this?"

The waitress suddenly appeared beside

him. "Oh I didn't notice you were with someone. I'll bring a menu for your brother here," she said.

Stacey leaned forward and stopped rubbing his hand. "Oh, he's not my brother."

She looked between the two men and laughed. "Yeah. Right." And then she grabbed another menu from the front and dropped it in front of Abel.

Abel looked up from the menu to Stacey, who said nothing. A few seconds of silence passed before Abel put his hand on the table and removed the napkin. The bleeding had mostly stopped, but the dried blood made it look worse than it actually was. Abel grabbed the tiny pencil next to the sushi menu, glanced at Stacey, and jammed the pointy tip into the wound. Stacey let out another short whimper and Abel wrapped the soiled napkin back around his hand.

Stacey didn't call him a psycho, or tell him to go back to his table, or say anything at all. They listened to the digitized ding and the din of conversation surrounding them for what felt like an hour, but was only a couple minutes.

"So, now what?" asked Stacey, rubbing his hand.

"First thing, I should probably go wash this out." Abel motioned to his hand. The blood was starting to show through the cloth. They locked eyes for another moment before Abel stood up and walked to the bathroom in the back of the restaurant. It was a single bathroom and he locked the door behind himself. Alone, looking into a mirror, he delicately washed his hand. The pain was sharp and deep, but not at the forefront of his mind. He had to wrap his head around the fact that a new, very important person had come into his life. It was someone with which he could share everything without reservation. They were the same, there was no need to worry about

being judged. There could be no secret, no thought of selfishness, because everything was inherently out in the open. This was beyond a girlfriend or a best friend, this was a better relationship with himself. And it was the genesis, the dawn of a new era. All he had to do was wrap his hand in paper towel, wrap that in the napkin, and go back into the restaurant. So that's exactly what he did. And he returned to an empty table.

"Ex—excuse me," he said to the waitress near the front door. "Did you see where the man sitting there went?" He motioned toward the table by the windows.

She gave him a polite smile and nodded. "Yes, yes he said he wasn't going to order and that he had to leave."

Abel's chest froze through. He had been abandoned. He walked back to the table, unsure of what he was looking for. There were only the menus, the pencil, and a glass of water. In exasperation, he swiped his hand over the menus and saw something fall to the floor. He leaned over and grabbed it. On the front was printed Stacey Forbes – Account Consultant followed by an e-mail address and phone number. He flipped it over and found, written in pencil, "Good luck."

There was no more hiding. It was all out

there and he would not shut Abel out of his life. Maybe he just needed a little time to wrap his head around it, or maybe he legitimately had to run back to work, but one thing was certain: He felt it. Abel was sure of it. He walked back to his original table and threw down some cash for his meal. Unworried about the change, he walked straight outside to the shining afternoon sun.

On paper, nothing had really changed. He had the same apartment, same job, but he now had something that couldn't be quantified. He had someone to share this existence and, for better or worse, that mitigating factor made it all seem worthwhile. A thought briefly flashed through his head: Why would another version of myself be necessary to justify the life I currently lead? But just as quickly as it came in, he banished the idea for perhaps another time. Right now, he wanted to soak in the new reality of having a second self. Most likely, a better self. As he hit the sidewalk and made his way back to the subway, his phone started ringing. For the first time in a while, he couldn't wait to talk to his mom.

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Torus

torus (pl. tori,) a surface of revolution...

Karl Shaddox

MEL STOOD BEHIND A WINDOW the size of the front wall on a squash court, so clear that she had to touch it to be sure it was there. Gazing at a ridge of distant low mountains, she was thinking about the immense, yet immensely overlooked role of failure in life. It was the successes that got the credit, achievement that garnered all the attention. Failure was unrecognized for how awful it felt as it did its work getting you where you needed to be. Mel was in a lecture hall on the 8th floor of a steel and glass tower. She was teaching the last of four English classes that day. Behind her two hundred students, seated in curved tiers like outgoing waves, worked silently on a mid-term test. Mel was one of six foreign teachers, British and North American, on the new campus of a large technical university in a western province of China. On the other side of the mountains lay the edge of the Taklamakan Desert, the fabled "Sea of Death." From her hushed, climate-controlled vantage point, dying from dehydration and exposure in a sand sea seemed far away in the realm of possibility; and yet, the previous month, a graduate student in engineering had ended his life there because his master's thesis had not been approved by the graduate school.

In the weeks following the discovery of his

remains, which, because of the desert's aridity, were in a remarkable state of preservation, there was a lot of hand wringing among the foreign faculty about the tremendous pressure university students were under. Someone mentioned the need for a place where students could go for counseling or just to relax. A letter to that effect was written to the University Provost, Mel, among its composers. The letter said that the student's death was pointless; it should not have happened, and that something should be done so that other, pointless deaths did not occur. It went on to propose a counseling center and perhaps a hotline. The letter was signed by the entire foreign faculty and sent, but there was no reply. A second letter, inquiring about the first, was also unanswered.

The administration's silence did not surprise the Canadian who considered himself an amateur sinologist. The young man's suicide was not pointless, he said. Not to the Chinese. Marxism wasn't the only idea imported from the West. The University, he claimed, cultivated a muscular Darwinian ethic which permeated all aspects of student life. Competition to get into the school was intense, and the pressure never relaxed until graduation. Prizes and favoritism to those who stood out

were commonplace while substandard work was singled out by instructors and held up for ridicule. Failure was not tolerated when there were over a hundred qualified candidates vying for every seat in the lecture halls. There seemed to be some truth in what the Canadian said, Mel thought. To be sure, her Chinese colleagues turned somber when the young man's death was mentioned, and she saw heartfelt sadness in their faces, but beneath their grief she sensed a resignation that these things happened for a reason. The weak would fall by the wayside. They would not hold back the strong.

Mel had no patience with that ethos. The shock for her in this was that somewhere in all the teaching that goes on at the University, no one taught this young man what he needed to know foremost in life: how to stay alive. Life was more than the acceptance of a thesis. For that matter, the survival of the fittest was sometimes not a case of being strong but being flexible. Wasn't that what adapting was all about? Mel was under no illusion that anything she had to say to this young man whom she never had as a student could have prevented him from wandering naked out into the desert at a time of the year when the temperature routinely edged above 110 degrees Fahrenheit, but for what it was worth she would have said that failure was not an end; it was never an end.

Her own failure, pivotal in the sense that it was why she was in China, was brutal to think about. After seven years as an assistant professor at a large research university on the East Coast, she was denied tenure; and because of the university's "up or out" policy, she was, in that moment, also terminated because of an ugly incident a few years ago in which an adjunct lecturer, whose contract was not renewed after ten years' service, pushed a

faculty member into a coffee machine, scalding her arm and dislocating her shoulder. It was also policy that campus security personnel accompany her back to her office to collect her things. Crossing the parking lot with the cop in tow had felt like a perp walk.

For the entire month of June, Mel did nothing but stare out the window and watch DVDs. She watched *The Sopranos*, all six seasons. She did not answer the phone, check texts, or email. She did not want to see anyone, especially friends in academia, but they came anyway dragging her out for drinks. She didn't feel like talking, but that didn't stop them. Sipping Sea Breezes in the bright summer afternoon, they chatted and argued among themselves about what was best for Mel, referring to her in the third person as though she wasn't sitting right there. She needed to go on a long cruise. She should have a fling with a male friend of theirs, a young associate professor in chemical engineering. Their ideas were well intentioned, but they were not what Mel needed. She felt injured and wronged, backed into a corner; she was poised to strike out. She had fantasies of Tony Soprano's enforcer, Furio Giunta, slipping a loop of piano wire around the neck of Dr. Flynn, the Chair of her tenure committee, and pulling the ends tightly until his pleading, piggy eyes squeezed shut and blood drooled from the corner of his mouth onto his tan Dockers. Yes, she had contemplated death after her application for tenure had been denied, just not her own.

At Thanksgiving her older sister asked if she'd given any thought to what she was going to do with the rest of her life. It was a fair question. Mel would be thirty-eight in December. Though her hair, strand by strand, was turning gray, and if she looked closely, fine lines, like those of an antique pottery glaze, had begun to appear on her upper lip, she was

in good health with the BMI of a twenty-nine year old. Barring an oncogene that went rogue and fruited her breasts or cervix with pods of cancer, she could expect to live another forty plus years. Both grandmothers were in their eighties. God, that's a long stretch, she thought. An abyss of time to fill with something, but what? Other than teaching at a university there wasn't a whole lot you could do with a PhD in English. It wasn't called a "terminal degree" for nothing.

Her sister, four years her senior, had filled her life with a calling. Nina, a minister with three children and a husband of seventeen years, was settling comfortably into middle age. Part of her plan was that baby sister Melody be settled too. She advised prayer, but Nina was the last person Mel took guidance from. In junior high, while Mel ran track and was the theater club president, Nina skipped classes to smoke weed with the cool kids. In her first year of college, Nina's future husband, a sigma alpha something, introduced her to coke. She dropped out after her sophomore year to sell advertising space on billboards and never graduated. Later, when Mel began coursework for a PhD, she attended a Halloween party at Nina's house where a 34 year old man was taken to the ER with a cracked vertebra after jumping off the roof. Then, a month after Mel defended her dissertation, she received a long letter from her sister saying that she and her husband were dedicating their lives to Christ. When her daughters started school, Nina began attending seminary. But rather than preach from the pulpit, she took a position as head of a community outreach program. She said to those who came to her program that she understood what they were going through because she had "been there, too." But as someone who had not "been there" because she had managed to live between the

extremes of abstinence and excess, Mel felt that Nina had nothing to offer her.

That spring, with no heart, Mel pushed herself through the motions of updating her vita, lining up new references and filling out applications for teaching posts in the fall. But job-hunting in academia had changed since she had been on the market ten years ago. Far fewer tenure track positions existed even as record numbers of PhDs swarmed out of graduate schools. She'd known it was bad, but she was not prepared for the carnage which job seeking in such a lopsided market produced. At the conferences she attended to get back into the swing of things, she confronted her competition: fresh, articulate, and when they learned that she at her advanced age was also on the market, deferential to the point of condescension. She despised them for their sheer numbers, their youth—above all their youth—their plucky confidence and mercenary politeness; and she avoided them mostly even as she knew it was those who schmoozed that got laid with a job.

"Shoulda got a masters in business administration," she said one night at a hotel lounge in Chicago. Earlier that day at Loyola, she'd read a paper at a symposium on hermeneutics. Across the table from her was a graduate student, an ABD who had commented favorably on her paper. He thought she was serious and began telling her of an online program he'd heard about in which an MBA could be had in eighteen months. Mel found this sadly hilarious and belly laughed for the first time in months.

After another drink, they went back to his room so he could show her the draft of a chapter of his dissertation. Now it was Mel's turn at misinterpretation when it turned out that the dissertation was indeed the reason he had asked her back. When, two hours later, wide awake on coffee and having critiqued the

whole goddamn chapter, she took the elevator back to her room chagrined and ruminating on the lack of subtlety and nuance in young people these days.

“So fucking serious,” she grumbled. The student had, however, put the idea in her head to look at teaching abroad, something she never considered because, when she was on the market just out of graduate school, it was common knowledge that unless your appointment was at a big university in Western Europe, preferably England, you would not work again on your return to the States. A stint in a third world college was career suicide. Things were different now, apparently. The teaching market was global. According to the ABD, placement counselors at his school were encouraging graduates to apply to institutions all over the map, from Dubai to Shanghai. And why not? Everything was outsourced these days. Why not your career?

Still Mel demurred. Years of academic enculturation with a strong bias towards Anglo-American institutions were not easily overcome. Then, at about rejection letter number 30 or 31, the last from a Bible college in Oklahoma, she said, “Fuck it, just fuck it.” Her world had turned topsy-turvy and would not be righted. There was no logic any more, she realized; or maybe a new logic operative, one she couldn’t fathom. A committed post-modern in her scholarly work, she should have known that no grand narrative was ever in place, nothing carved in stone. You made up your idea of a life as you went along, stumbling forward in a shadowy maze of sudden turns, awkward transitions and dead ends, the object being—if there was one—to get through it all with the least pain possible. An effort, she reflected, that bore remarkable resemblance to some of her former students’ term papers. What did those slackers at the tender age of

nineteen know that she at nearly forty did not?

Mid summer, she applied to an ad in *The Chronicle of Higher Ed* for someone to teach literary theory at a university in Hong Kong. She was turned down for that post, but someone on the search committee took the liberty of forwarding her application, references, book chapter and all, to an associate who was pulling together a faculty for a new university on the mainland. A few weeks after she interviewed via Skype, she received a registered letter from an institute somewhere it took five minutes to find on an atlas—she had not realized China was so big—offering her a position as assistant professor of English and literary theory.

By August, Mel was a member of the inaugural faculty of the Humanities Department at New Frontier Technical University, a government-built college town in China’s arid west. At the edge of the expansive campus, huge orange machines rambled back and forth over the barren landscape like reptiles from the Mesozoic age. Beyond, surveyors hunched over tripods, staking further claim to the surrounding desert. Though she was in a country which rivaled Egypt in longevity, she sometimes looked around her and wondered where the hell she was. This was the country that had invented paper and printing, that had given the world both The Tao and Mao. Yet there were no temples or pagodas out here, and the students, brandishing smart phones instead of little red books, looked and acted like students anywhere, like at her old university. But then, only in China could a town of 10,000 be laid out in the middle of nowhere and be up and running in three years. Putting a couple of men on the moon seemed child’s play in comparison.

Other than movies, ballroom dancing, and semester end squash tournaments, social life

in University Town was non-existent; so for the first couple of months she and the other foreign faculty gathered in one or the other's apartment to drink Heineken and complain about all things Chinese. Besides Mel, there was one other woman, also from the US, in their faculty group. Then, over the course of the semester, the four men, from Canada and the UK, disappeared from the circle when they discovered that with a little effort they could leverage the esteem of some of their female students up to dating and sex. For a week Mel hung out with Trish, but all she talked about was what jerks their male colleagues were; 'pedagogic pedophiles,' she called them. Were they in the States, she insisted, they would be hounded out of the university, their names put on the national sex offenders' list. Then Mel deserted her too.

She began keeping company with an older instructor of physics who had once held a visiting professorship at Queensland University in Australia. Liew Bo Jun had been 'sent down' to New Frontier Tech as a lowly assistant professor after he became a political liability because of his 'outspokenness' at the prestigious university where he had taught and conducted research for 25 years. Jun found the whole narrative of Mel's coming to China because she could not find work in the US utterly fascinating. He told her about a great uncle who, in 1910, left his hometown in Anhui Province after a business failure, his second. Fleeing creditors, he traveled east till he wound up in the American West where he became, eventually, a great success in retail. Jun liked to tease Mel with lines from the Lazarus poem, "The New Colossus." "Mel," he would say, "are you tired and poor? Did you come to China yearning to breathe free?"

At times his bitterness and sarcasm grated, but she tolerated it because, more so than

with any of her western colleagues, she felt they resonated. Like when they discussed the young man who had walked naked into the desert the month before after his thesis had been declined. They had spent a wonderful afternoon and evening visiting the ruins of a way station on a minor spur of the Silk Road, and then later, from Mel's terrace high in the faculty dorm, they watched the sun evaporate on the far horizon like a puddle of mercury. They dined on take out crab jiaozi and curried koorka, and then reclined in her bed with sniffers and a bottle of cassis she'd bought on a weekend trip to Macau. Piecemeal, Mel began taking articles of her clothing off and placing them on a chair beside the bed, her blouse over the back, Capris on the seat, all the while telling Jun of her rumination on failure the previous week. She explained how being denied tenure over a year ago had set off the concatenation of events that had brought her here to this desert in western China. "Had it not been for that," she remarked, "I would not be enjoying this evening with you now."

"Quite right," Jun replied, kissing her forehead. We would be taking off our clothes for others as the result of other failures. It's called a multiverse. We teach that in physics. "To think," he said solemnly, "that in all possible universes, we have sex with everyone." She laughed at his joke and then said, "What I meant was, given the, well, blind variegation in life, success and failure lose meaning. So his death was pointless." Jun said nothing and began untying his shoes.

"Pointless," she repeated to herself. Though it was the word she and the other foreign instructors had emphasized in their letters to the Provost, it now seemed precisely the wrong word. It was evasive, dissembling; it did not stand up to the robust Darwinism of the Chinese administration. She and the other

foreigner instructors may as well have taken Nina's counsel and prayed, giving the mystery of the student's death up to God. No wonder their letters went unanswered.

"Ah, him," Jun said finally, "the student who could not accept his failure." She turned to him unsure whether his pat reply was more of his cynicism or simply the blunt syntax of a non-native English speaker. She removed her bra and panties. Lying there, naked as life, she thought that were she to come up with one tenet to rebut the administration's callous social theory

and offer as a way out to that distraught young man whom she'd never met, it would be the strange and wonderful certainty that if you continued far enough west, you wound up in the east.

By now, Jun, too, had removed his clothing, draping his trousers on the chair beside the bed, shirt over the back. Lying there, he said, "We're living on the edge out here, Mel." He took her hand, and, for a fleeting moment, she imagined them creatures, having molted dead outer layers, come to frolic on this primeval plain. Yes, she thought, the wild west.

A writer, teacher, hiker and biker in San Francisco, Karl Shaddox has published essays on posthumanism in Human Rights Quarterly, American Studies in Culture and Comparative Literature and Culture.



Stairway

Hollie Savage

Too High Bottom Step ...having visited Dove Cottage and returned last night to London

Paul Nelson

she climbs the stairs of her red double decker bus
on little feet not lightly to the front and takes her seat
with airs and graces risen for happy perspective,
an “angel of sorts” her Nana said.. always.
Below her and that feral pigeon swirling
there are varihued humans,
beings headed in many directions
with fervency she finds quite pleasing,
as she would a string quartet in “the Tube”
or Joffrey dance in the Taj Mahal.
Yes she has ridden a dusty white elephant
in a howdah very like this red joggity bus
viewing vender carts, keosks, and occupied benches,
hundreds of black umbrellas like clichés
furled as her considerations of these mammals,
as her weatherly dispensations.
Of course she knows as we might know innately
an end is coming that she must descend to
that some poets call home ...or Fitchburg
Valhalla for Finns who escaped lives.
Her expired family from Hanko never knew her,
vague girl when told of the Estonian labor camp
that killed Grandfather as no place to plant seeds,
or “see the world” as Chagall had to ...or her Austen.
Grim affirmation seems the haze that happy intuition
gyres in as her bus squeals across her trope to the bus stop
and she drops drops reluctantly to the last steel step
musing above the distant curb and her carping knees
Frailties can make angels of us all if we watch, maybe,

feel for intimations that do not come with birth
when lowering ourselves with worn condescension
well behind the young folk hopping down bonk bonk
dull and unaware that elders need to fly like green
linnets, wrens or cuckoos, or make a tin nightingale
by apt exploit and not by choice concerned
with this alien world, observed from high places
to make “generous sense of.” You heard her,
and here comes her lovely bent old Viking
his arms open and happy to receive her,
help her to the street so gently while she demurs
folds her wings and chortles to find herself grounded.

Paul Nelson's latest of 8 books is BURNING THE FURNITURE, Guernica Editions, 2014. His work has won an AWP Award for Poetry, a University of Alabama Press Series Selection, and an NEA Fellowship. For a decade, Professor/Director of Creative Writing, Ohio University, he lives and writes now on the North Shore of O'ahu.

Burglar!

Mike Scofield

BUB STRUGGLED with an acute sense of uselessness. From where he stood, in the dining room, he had a fine view of the street. A truck was due to deliver an acrylic slip tub within the next hour and a half. The driver's only obligation: Leave it at the curb.

What was the matter with him? Christ, this was the first morning he'd taken off from work in months. Had he worked for so long that every moment out of harness had to leave him awash in guilt?

"We really aren't in control of ourselves," he said to Miff, the cat. "The goddam system has us."

They thought about this together and then both returned to looking out the window.

An hour and a half! Bub re-folded the pre-bill of lading and slid it into his back pocket. He swept his gaze from out the dining room windows to the kitchen clock: 9:37. Then he glanced out the far kitchen window to its view of the Zarnofsky's deck. At that moment, the top of a navy-hooded head, followed by a furrowed forehead, weirdly blond eyebrows, and milky, alert eyes rose above the sill.

Bub froze. He ceased breathing. Burglar! Bub watched the son of a bitch and hoped that he couldn't be seen. Could he? It was bright outside, dim in here. The burglar peered here

and there trying to make things out while Bub's eyes drilled into his. They never connected. Navy arms rose along the casement to the top sash and shoved it. The sudden sound so near shot another blast of adrenaline through Bub. The window didn't give. The burglar arms and burglar head sank beneath the sill.

Bub bolted on tiptoes to the stairs, took them three at a time, and stopped when he reached his nightstand. He wrenched the entire bottom drawer out and swung it onto the bed. He set the black Glock on the bedspread, stuffed a full magazine into the gun and one in his jeans, and raced back down through the house.

He guessed the burglar was moving to the back of the house, so he edged into the kitchen, studying the windows as he went. He paused at the dishwasher. Miff came and sat in front of him. The house was so quiet they could hear the stove clock tick.

A soft tug at the back door and an unfriendly jiggling of the knob. Bub knew the door was secure. It had locked behind Karen when she left for work. But should he burst through the door, pin the fucker to the ground with the Glock and call for the cavalry?

No. The burglar wasn't a burglar yet. He was just a dirtbag in Bub's yard. He needed to

forcibly enter. Or maybe enter and make off with something. Of course, the making off with something would be stopped very quickly.

The door to the cellar was behind him. The wheels turned intensely in Bub's brain. If he got in through an unlocked window, was that burglarizing? The cellar windows had that little twirly thing that catches the sill. Was that a lock?

Yes! Of course! Kicking in a cellar window was burglarizing. It would be a burglar he confronted.

A thud against the lower wall to his right traveled right through Bub's legs and made him take the safety off the gun. He eased open the cellar door. Another thud followed by the crash of breaking glass and then... Silence.

Bub listened while the burglar waited to see if anyone else had heard the breaking. Bub quietly swung wide the door. He crouched, wincing at the audible popping his joints made, and stared down at the first few feet of dim basement floor. He had trouble controlling his breathing. At first he didn't breathe at all. When that didn't work, he took little inward gasps, but was afraid of making noise so he twisted his head to his shoulder and took a big breath through the side of his mouth.

A drawn-out sliding sound made him look forward quickly. There was a pair of sneakered feet and blue-jeaned lower legs where a moment ago there had been only smooth gray concrete.

Before the trembling in his hands could travel to his feet, Bub banged down the cellar stairs and hit the floor with the Glock out in both hands and a pretty good imitation of a policeman's offensive stance.

"FEEZE!" he garbled.

The burglar jumped, his hands literally flying up to tap the overhead pipes, but in the same motion he was suddenly turned around

and halfway out the window.

"I'll shoot!" Bub shouted at the man's swinging legs. "Fuck!"

Bub let go of the gun with his right hand and grabbed a swinging ankle with his right. The burglar's free leg scissored and bopped Bub hard in the nose. The flash of searing pain dazzled his sight as he staggered backward from the blow and tripped over the recycling bin.

Instinctively, his left hand shot out to catch his fall and did so by banging his trigger finger against a support beam.

BANG!

The feeling of being skewered through both buttocks with a white-hot poker launched Bub back up and at the burglar's legs. He got kicked again before reaching back to clutch his on-fire ass.

"AHHHH!"

The burglar's foot was just clearing the sill...

"NO!" Bub couldn't let him get away and be left empty handed, shot through the butt. "NO!"

He went at the burglar again and grabbed that foot with both red, slippery hands. "You FUCKING PIECE OF SHIT!"

The burglar tugged with all he had. Bub clamped his hands hard around the skinny ankle and locked his fingers together. The burglar backed up to kick at Bub. Against his own gnashing of teeth, Bub could hear the burglar breathing hard from his struggle. But could Bub hang on long enough to tire him to submission? What was going on with his ass? Could he bleed out through it?

"Got a tub here," a new man's voice called out in the drive. "Hey, man, you need help?"

The burglar struggled harder but never said a word.

"He's a BURGLAR!" shouted Bub. "KICK

him in the HEAD!"

"Say WHAT? A BURglar?"

"He's gonna get away! KICK him in the HEAD!"

"No way!" The trucker moved up the drive so he could get a better look at what was going on at the basement window. His eyes met Bub's when he looked past the burglar and down into the gloom of the cellar. "You order a tub?"

"Jesus Christ! Do something! He'll get away!"

"Well I ain't kickin' him in the head!"

"Call a cop – do something!"

The trucker stood back and assessed the situation. He shook his head at the panting burglar, in a sprinter's stance, ready to bolt from the block once the hands at his ankle released him.

"Do something," he muttered to himself. He left.

The burglar almost yanked his leg away from Bub, whose grip momentarily slipped.

"God!"

But a rush of anger through Bub tightened his grip and he did his own yanking. Sweat or blood or both trickled down his leg. The burglar kicked frantically. Bub held on.

Beyond the hard breathing and squirming in the window, a rolling, grinding sound arose

from somewhere out on the drive. It grew louder until an immense cardboard carton, lashed with clear poly to an over-sized pallet and tilted up on a dolly, trundled into view. It turned toward them and grew even larger, becoming a light brown wall that rapidly filled the background of the burglar.

His hands shot up to ward it off; Bub tugged.

"Burglar's coming back in with you, Boss."

The burglar gave way to the tub by pushing off of the sill. The center of his back hit Bub

squarely in the face, sending him sprawling onto his injured ass.

"OW!"

He was up as quickly as he went down. But not fast enough. The burglar ran past him and streaked up the stairs.

"GODDAM IT!"

Bub tried the same but slipped on the bottom step. As he caught himself, he found himself looking down at the dark floor for an instant. There was the pistol! He clawed at it... had it... and stumbled up the steps.

The burglar was at the front door, maniacally working the dead bolt, when Bub lumbered in from the kitchen.

"FEEZE!"

The door swung open and the burglar went through it. Bub followed quickly but was surprised by the outside wrought-iron door when the burglar slammed it back into his face. He absorbed the blow, though it cost him a step or two backward and contusions to both brows, and took up the chase again.

Bounding down the front steps he soon found himself so close – so close – that he could just... about... grab... the bastard's... hoody... when the burglar pulled the front walk's large planter over between them in a riotous rainbow of brilliant color and spilling dirt.

Bub flew out like a very temporary Superman, landing on his gun hand, breaking his trigger finger and – BANG! – sending the ensuing bullet across the street and through the Englebart's picture window – CRASH!

The breath knocked out of him – something he hadn't experienced since he was a kid and a thing that he didn't handle any better now – Bub was momentarily aware of the burglar getting away down Chestnut Street, but also that the trucker and his big box truck were right in front of his house. The trucker, in

fact, stood on the sidewalk in something like a linebacker stance, wide-eyed.

"HAAAAAAAA!" Bub tried to tell him to stop the burglar.

"Man!" said the trucker.

Bub's cracked finger then sent a bolt of intense pain to his dizzy brain. He rolled up...

"HAAAAAAAA!"

and crouched, holding his finger and straining for breath. It came back in little sips until he thought he had the energy to stand, which he did, slowly, to find the trucker in front of him with an arm out, wanting to help but not sure how.

"What can I do?" asked the trucker.

"HAahhhh..."

Bub stooped, piercing pain shooting through his hand, fire in his ass and a throbbing skull, to pick up the gun with his left hand as a police car roared up and slid-screamed to a halt in front of the box truck. Trucker took a step back and raised his hands, gesticulating wildly and shouting that the burglar was getting away.

"DROP THE GUN!" shouted the passenger cop who was now out and kneeling behind his open door in full offensive stance, sidearm aimed at Bub. "DROP THE GUN!"

Bub dropped the gun and put his hands up. The driver cop was around the front of the car like a running back and crossing Bub's yard fast. He drove his skull into Bub's gut and Bub into his newly sodded yard so hard that a seam broke open and a flap of grass carpet dropped over his face.

The world swirled when he was flipped over but it stopped when a knee pinned his neck to the turf. He would have screamed when his hands were mashed together but he had lost his breath again – possibly for the final time – and cuffs were snapped expertly onto his wrists.

When he was hauled up he slowly realized, over his heaving, that the trucker was trying to reason with the police.

"This guy is just the guy with the tub! This guy was in the cellar and the other guy was a burglar with him! I pushed the tub into the window and they both came out. He went that way!"

The cops were pissed when they realized that Bub was really injured – "I, haaaaa, haaaa, haaaa! I haaaa... shot myself in the ass!" – and rolled their eyes when they looked at his stupidly bloodied backside.

The driver cop huffily pulled his radio and called for an ambulance. The passenger cop locked Bub's Glock in the patrol car's trunk and then took the trucker aside to get his statement. The trucker was released by the police just as the ambulance arrived. He waved at Bub.

"Good luck!" he called. "Good luck with the tub!"

Bub watched him go, watched the bright ambulance and bright ambulance guys, before he thought to thank the trucker. But too late. He was pulling away.

Though the cops had identified Bub, his rightful ownership of the Glock, and necessary permit, they remained with him as he was sprawled, bare-assed, on a gurney in the EMERGENCY ROOM, a nurse splinting his finger and the doctor suturing his pierced buttocks. Though somewhat accidental, he had fired a gun in a residential area and caused property damage. He was facing misdemeanors and they would not drop it. Karen could take him home but the system wasn't done with him.

After riding on his side in her back seat and before limping over to the Engleberts' to explain/apologize for their window – already plywood – Bub approached the crate warily.

There was no way he could move it away from the window in his condition but he just had to see what condition it was in. The way today had gone, he expected to find a \$2300 pile of jagged acrylic pieces where a gleaming tub had been. And if, after all, it proved to be OK, a meteor would scream down, wiping him, his wife, and the fucking tub from the planet.

He cut the bands, cut carefully the cardboard, and removed the big box. The tub was lustrous white on black claw feet with big

blocks of Styrofoam strapped to it. He cut the straps and eased out the blocks. He studied the tub: front, right side, left side. Karen crouched and got a look at the side by the cellar window. She straightened and smiled. The tub looked even better than it had online. Bigger, of course, but here in the driveway, perfect.

Bub could only think that Death was near. He looked up at the house, at Miff in the window, and waited for it.

Mike Scofield enjoys living in a world where some things make sense and the rest make great stories.

You and I At The Cemetery

Barry Yeoman

You cradle several buckeyes
in your dress, shiny and wet
fresh from their prickly rinds
on the hill at the cemetery.
A weathered gravestone
cracked and uplifted
from the rocky shoveling
of a groundhog mound.
Endless smooth monuments
waiting patiently
on an invasion of roots
vandals and weather.
Bushy tailed squirrels
gather among rows of markers,
vast valleys of time.
Silence can be so huge.

If the world has forgotten us
it would be nothing
to the scrappy sparrows
searching for seeds.
A passing ambulance
outside the iron fenceposts
of the grounds
could be another ending.
Life is a race
without survivors
but it is always peaceful here.
Serene in the face
of so much death.
Just the quiet colors
of the changing season
falling for us together.

Barry Yeoman was educated at Bowling Green State Univ., The Univ. of Cincinnati, and The McGregor School of Antioch Univ., in creative writing, world classics, and the humanities. He is originally from Springfield, Ohio and currently lives in London, Ohio. His work has appeared, or is forthcoming in Red Booth Review, Futures Trading, Danse Macabre, Harbinger Asylum, Red Fez, Vine Leaves Literary Journal, Crack the Spine, Burningword Literary Journal, Two Hawks Quarterly, Broad River Review, Soundings Review and The Rusty Nail, among others. Recently, he was a finalist for the 2014 Rash Award in Poetry hosted by Broad River Review. You can read more of his published work at www.redfez.net/member/1168/bookshelf