

Earl Townsend

Double Jeopardy



1

A statue of a bronze Olympian cat is by my left ear lobe. My thigh is almost punctured by a puffer fish. A model car is parked too close to me.

I think if I jumped I could make it to the couch.

An old-style bicycle with a big wheel in the front is thinking about coming over and having dinner. I retreat to the corner by the forgotten Queen of Hearts and try to think of my old home. That's life on a living room shelf.

The old man comes into the room and turns on the T.V. It's a 70-inch plasma screen Panasonic. He turns the channel to NBC and watches *Jeopardy*. The old woman comes in five minutes later with a tray of cheddar cheese and crackers.

She sits by the old man and they both watch *Jeopardy*.

The girl descends the blue staircase on the left with wet hair. She walks back to the kitchen. Someone knocks on the door and the old man gets up to answer it.

It's the pizza lady. She's wearing her usual low-cut white uniform. The old man thinks of Puerto Rico for a split second as he blinks into the extraterrestrial moonlight. He pays the pizza lady, puts the pizza on the small, square, dining room table, and shuts the door.

The girl gets some pizza and sits down by her parents in time to watch Final Jeopardy. An acupuncturist from Rhode Island named Rachel wins \$45,000. She'd already won four shows before that and now she has made \$178,500.

"I hope she keeps winning!" the girl says.

2

I was hospitalized after tightrope walking from a low building to a high one. A turquoise nurse walked into the room and said, "I want all of your mind." Another nurse came in and said, "I want all of your body." Soon ten nurses were in the room and they all wanted something from me. I said, "No one's getting anything. Where's my doctor?"

The first nurse came in dressed in doctor clothes. Discovering I was perfectly fine, I got up and walked out of the room. I then walked out of the hospital. I walked to the edge of the street. I waved to an old friend standing on the other side. It was almost not daytime.

The atmosphere had been stunned and atomized by a Listerine squirt gun. I hailed a rickshaw. My new wife was already in the backseat. Full of youngness, she looked at me and became spaceless. Her hang gliders of light vacuumed my vision field. She said that we had to go home.

I said, "Good. I like home."

The skinny man with turbo legs started running and we started moving. Way up high there was a building reflecting traffic lights using the frozen rain lines of its windows. The lights changed between red, yellow, and green. I felt the heat of her voice hit my face from the left.

"We're going downtown tonight."

"I have to go uptown tomorrow."

"We're only going to dinner."

"Okay, good. We're just stopping by the house then?"

"Yeah. I forgot my underpants."

I had been put on the white shelf in a hallway an hour and 32 minutes ago by an exotic woman who was somewhere between 23 and 27 years old. A man walked through the white door I was facing and held the door open for the exotic woman to step through. They seemed to be in a relaxed rush.

He said to her, "So where are we going to dinner?"

"Vinnutti's!"

"Great. I love Vinnutti's. I'm very hungry, you know."

"I bet you are."

The exotic woman walked to the left on the bamboo floor and the man waited by the white door. In twenty-eight seconds she returned and they both went out the white door. I was still standing on the white shelf. My new neighbor was a lava lamp from Oregon. He used to belong to a horticulturist named Tina but she gave him to Goodwill. He went through several Goodwill transfers and ended up here, by me, on the white shelf in the hallway of the exotic woman, facing the white door.

3

I was looking at a sunny beach. There was a bright blue ocean beyond the beach. There were palm trees laughing at the breeze. I was on a wooden shelf facing a wall that was a window. And I was looking at the sunny beach.

A hippie man without any clothes on came into the room and started meditating.

He meditated for an hour without moving. The sunlight slowly made its way into the room until the entire room was cloaked in optimism.

I had stayed with the exotic woman and her husband for four months before I was given to this man, who was said to be her brother. It was the first time I'd ever been alone on a shelf and it was a welcome change of pace. Maybe I should try to stay here?

4

Five months in and I was still with the hippie man. He had no visitor's in that time and he meditated every morning at 7 a.m. He would then make a breakfast of alfalfa sprouts and mashed yeast and take a shower. He would then get dressed in a gray suit and leave.

I would usually start a conversation with the green floor lamp across the room and ask him all the usual things one asks of others like, "How are you today?" and "How long have you lived here?" He had lived there for five years. He said that the man, whose name was David, rarely changed anything in the house. He said that David had eaten the same breakfast everyday he'd been there. "Five years straight of alfalfa sprouts and mashed yeast," the lamp said.

Once a beach ball rolled across the beach. Then more beach balls came rolling by until the entire beach ball was filled with beach balls

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rolling down it.

“Well that’s weird,” the lamp said.

“Yeah,” I said.

Another peaceful month passed and it only rained once. Then one evening, when David was making his dinner of quinoa and tofu dressed in balsamic vinegar, four men in gray suits came in and said, “David!”

“Yes?” David said.

The men formed a quick semicircle around David and then one of them said, “Can you make us some of that quinoa and tofu salad?”

“Yes, of course,” David said.

David made the salad and they all sat around a low circular table and ate sitting on the hemp rug.

David said, “I made this table myself.”

“That so?”

“That doesn’t surprise me, David. You’ve always been very resourceful.”

“Yeah. Remember that time in Hong Kong?” said one of the men.

“Yes! How could I forget the time in Hong Kong!” David said.

“Hell of a time,” two of the men said.

“Yeah,” David said.

They ate and talked respectfully and calmly. When everyone was done, everyone stood up. The men went out the door and said, “See you tomorrow, David.”

“Sure,” David said.

5

The next month went by without incident and I was by that time very relaxed and content with my new home. One day David didn’t meditate. He just made his breakfast and read the news on his iPad. The day was as sunny as all the rest and the seagulls were doing a synchronized dance routine. Anytime a human could see them, they stopped and scattered slightly, but they started up again when no one was watching.

At 8:10 a.m. the exotic woman and her husband walked in and said, “Hello. David!” She was as young as ever and seemed to radiate everything good. He was still in very good spirits. She said, “Thanks for letting us come, David. We needed to get away.”

“I bet. It’s hectic up there.”

“Very,” said the husband.

“Well, I’ll be back in a week. Have a good time. There’s no rain in

sight,” David said.

“Okay. Thanks again, David,” said the exotic woman.

“Yep.”

David left in his gray suit holding a large buckle-filled leather luggage bag.

The exotic woman, whose name was Rosalie, and her husband, whose name I can't remember, were very happy the whole week. They went out for every meal and made human origami every night. They sunbathed on the beach and swam in the bright blue ocean every day. They were even happier than when I lived with them.

David came back the following Tuesday and Rosalie and her husband left. They all said pleasant “thank-yous” and “goodbyes.”

The evening came and I watched twenty-five pelicans scratch the surface of the ocean with their long wings. The seagulls did their sunset dance routine and an iguana contemplated his existence as the sun dripped behind the edge of the ocean.