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Andrew Hudgins

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Winesburg, Indiana: Raymond Snow

Abstract

I was wearing mittens because the warehouse was cold as hell so maybe I didn't have as good a grip on the forklift's wheel as I thought I did when I slipped my blades into the skip, and somebody must have got the load off-center because when I lifted, the forks hadn't gone all the way in, and the TVs—the flat screens, plasmas break if you just fart in their general direction—sort of slouched on the pallet at about three feet up. So I sped up to try to force the fork all the way in. That's when I kinda tossed 'em into the shelving unit that tipped and hit another shelving unit that tipped too, but luckily there was a wall next, so it wasn't nearly as bad as it could have been.

Keywords

under the influence, on the job, surveillance, social skills

Cover Page Footnote

Note: "This story is exclusively available in the anthology, *Winesburg, Indiana*, published by Breakaway Books, an imprint of Indiana University Press, in the spring of 2015. Available wherever fine books are sold, borrowed, or used as dowry."

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Well, that's what they have insurance for.

Foreman, that was Wally, kept screaming words like stupid and drunk and shit like that but he got quiet when Mr. Hanson pulled up to the overhead door in that big turd-brown 1980s Cadillac because he—I mean Wally—was starting to remember that there was two joints smoked out in his car before the shift started and I'd only smoked one though I'd paid for two, though he did let me have a couple of chugs from the bottle of Beam he keeps under the front seat so it sort of evens out maybe. Once they got to asking questions they might want to know if any of that Schedule 20 stainless pipe that was short on the last inventory and that Mr. Hansen wouldn't stop bitching about was maybe under a tarp back of somebody's garage and I don't have a garage.

I was fired and all that shit, who's surprised? But I came back a couple weeks later to

eat lunch with the guys cause I thought Wally might help me find another job for keeping my mouth shut and all, but I saw that wasn't never going to happen. Before we even got to the break room, I was standing next to him at the urinal, and he nodded up at the ceiling with his chin and said, It must suck to be the asshole who has to sit all day and watch us pee.

I said, Wha'?

And he said, Since you left they been watching us all the time. Wired the whole damn place, putting in cameras. Didn't make no secret of it.

But they can't do it in here, can they?

Not *legally*.

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So for help I went to Brenda, the blond girl I was chasing then and not getting much of nowhere—hair so white it looked fake because it was fake, but hell she was trying. She helped me get on doing night clean up at Hendry's IGA and that wasn't so bad because it's small and the butchers do all their own clean up. That's the worst stuff mostly, 'cept for the toilets, and ain't but two of those and they aren't for customers, so you know who's using them and they know you know, and I don't mind calling them out about piss on the floor if I have to. So I ate pretty good for a couple of months going toward spring—mostly just sliced bread and lunch meat, nothing too big—when I started seeing this little brunette. Bit of a mistake that one, freckly girl, single again at forty and ready for it though she moaned a lot about when I was going to sleep over at her house like I was all excited about walking out of her bedroom in the morning and grinning an I-been-boning-your-mom grin at a seventeen-year-old boy forty pounds bigger than me and lettering in football and felonious assault. Brenda didn't get me fired about the brunette, but she did put the night manager on alert so I had to start buying my own food, which was like taking a pay cut.

But here's the whole point I've been getting to, which was that I brought Brenda, once we got back together for awhile, to Fourth of July at my rich cousin Robert's place out in the country because it was his turn and he owns his house. Been Bobby till he got to high school, then he was Bob. But go to law school and make a fortune putting criminals back on the street and you become Robert and don't have to listen when somebody calls you Bobby even though he drug you out of your granddaddy's oak tree when your ladder fell over and you'd been up there crying for three hours like a baby. Even fetched down his damn wind-up plastic airplane for his little crybaby ass.

They set us at porch table with the children and Stevey, and his wife whose name I never can remember, something like Will Fred. That's not it exactly, but it's what I call her. She answers to it. And just as soon as I took a big bite of rich-cousin hamburger and started chewing, Stevey says in that slow retarded way of his, I wan you stop tell people I retarded.

I never told no one you a retard, Stevey, I said, and Brenda looked at me funny, which reminded me I had told her and done a little imitation too, which she didn't like but her brothers laughed at it pretty good.

Let's be clear here. Stevey is a retard. He worked in the sheltered workshop for a year—it's where he met his wife—before they got him that job at Circle K he's had for like ten years. Daddy always said Stevey had a certificate from the state proving he was a retard but I've never seen it. It's not exactly something you bring out when rich cousin Robert is showing everybody *Winesburg Argus* clippings about every base hit his boy made or the ribbons his girls won in horse jumping.

Mr. smuh, smuh, shuh—Mr. Smitherman at work tole me you tole ev'body at your work I wah retard.

Then Mr. Smuh's a liar.

He said I han't drop pah, pah, pallet TVs.

The retard wife and the kids at the table started giggling till I stood up, and just as I was trying to decide if I should hit him or kick the table over, Robert put his hand on my shoulder and said, Why don't you do what Steve asks and not talk about him. That'd be like a kindness to everyone, don't you think? Let's go see if there's another one of those—whatcha got there, Molsons? So I picked up the rest of my burger and followed him to get a beer I didn't have much taste for anymore because he was right that you shouldn't torment the less fortunate. I did motion Brenda in front of me, gentleman like, before I turned back and kinda swept my eyes over Stevey and Will Fred and them kids too so they'd know Uncle Ray hadn't forgot nothing. Over by the beer tub, I could tell Robert wanted to say something more, so I just took a couple of Molsons in each hand and led Brenda straight to the truck. Told Brenda she should take a couple too but she said, No, I don't think so.

Andrew Hudgins teaches at Ohio State University. His most recent books are *American Rendering: New and Selected Poems* (Harcourt Houghton Mifflin, 2010) and *Diary of a Poem* (University of Michigan Press, 2011).