

Short Cuts

by Jake Barnes

From My Doorstep

I have been sitting here for twenty years watching you as you pass my house. You, you, and you. Lady with cell phone on her ear coming and going, after thirty minutes still talking, talking. Black lady with a dog and then no dog, same huge walking stick, a formidable weapon; I wave and she waves back. Old Asian couple, arm in arm, sometimes one or the other far ahead, the other trailing, the woman holding a cigarette, her fingers arrayed like a fan. Missy with a fuzzy beret and black lipstick and eye shadow. (For God's sake don't say anything to her; she'll stop and talk for twenty minutes.) Young stud in a cutoff T-shirt, a twerpy moustache, full of himself, two big German Shepherds on leashes towing him along. The real estate broker (don't talk to him either) and his two little dogs. The old Czech who stops and admires your old truck, wants to buy it. Matron with big tits who over the years seems to get smaller, her tits bigger. Housewife who always stops and talks. The couple with a baby in a stroller and their stub-tailed cat who follows at their pace but always about fifty feet behind.

The Salon

My wife makes an appointment for us at the salon. This time I get the skinny woman with glasses. She always wears black pants and a black smock. A tall youngster with a pretty face clips my wife's claws, then paints her toenails.

I ask my manicurist about the cats. She takes the bus to work. There is a colony of ferals near her bus stop in San Jose. She feeds the animals. Today she is concerned because there is a kitten who is crawling with fleas and maybe sick.

My wife asks the girl who is working on her toes if she has any children. One, she says. This surprises me. She looks like a high school student.

The shop is swarming with little women. All the girls who work there are from Vietnam, I'd guess. Women from SE Asian seem to have a corner on the market on the west coast where we live.

Usually I pay the bill, but I let my wife pay this time. The cat lady is still working on my toes. Pulling them. Rubbing lotion on my feet.

"You have big feet," she says. She looks up at me and smiles. One of the other girls giggles.

When she is finished with me, I put on my shoes and socks. I fish a twenty out of my wallet and give it to the cat lady. I tell her to buy some food for the cats.

Missing

He gets home from work one day and finds that his wife is missing. Her clothes are gone, too. So is her car and their new television.

There is a note on a table in the den. "Goodbye and good luck," it says.

He goes into the kitchen and fills the dog's water bowl. Then he feeds the dog and cat. Then he fixes himself a sandwich and takes it into the den and sits down. He chews his sandwich and drinks a Heineken out of the bottle and flips through the TV Guide to see what he would have watched if he had a TV.

