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by Michael K. White

When Dean packed for the hospital, he wasn't thinking about the end of his life. He wasn't looking around his bedroom thinking, this is the last time I will see that picture or this is the last time I will look at this light bulb. He was thinking about his lucky Quarter. And salt and pepper. Which he wasn't allowed to have. Sherry, his wife was in the other room, on the phone to their daughter Aggie at Fort Bragg.

"Dad has to go into the hospital again," he heard her say, her voice far away in the other room. "They want to test his heart again."

Dean sat down on the bed. He felt tired. He stuffed the salt and pepper shakers deep into the bag where Sherry wouldn't find it. He was panting on the bed. Tired. He was finding it harder and harder to care anymore. He used to be scared of dying, of dying suddenly, like he had died five years before at Rollie Ford taking the truck in for an oil change and keeling over in the lobby. For four minutes he had been dead and he regretting not having any memory of it. When he died the first time, his fists were clenched tightly and it was only later at the hospital that they unclenched and inside of one they found his lucky Quarter.

Dean didn't remember what he had a Quarter in his fist for. What could he buy at Rollie Ford for a Quarter? That day was still hazy to him. He remembered taking the truck in. The next thing he remembered flying over the grand canyon and watching the rocks fight over cactus.

Man that was some good shit they gave him in the hospital!

"Dean!" Sherry was calling from the other room. Dean grunted so she could hear him and he heard her resume her

conversation with their daughter Aggie. Aggie had just gotten back from Afghanistan where, according to a letter Dean got from a major Charles W. Pierce, Aggie single handedly killed seven insurgents, saving her whole squad. To Dean she was still his little girl who didn't have enough sense to come in out of the rain. He chuckled at the image of Aggie standing, grinning in the rain, proud of not having enough sense to come in.

"..just checking oxygen levels in his blood.." He heard Sherry say and he rubbed his chest, where the pacemaker was. The times it had gone off and kicked him had scared him so badly that he began praying to God again, something he hadn't done since he was a little boy. "Okay God, I swear I'll never eat another pickle or smoke another cigarette if you only give me one more year." He wanted his grandkids to be old enough to remember him. He wondered if they thought of him as he thought of his own grandfather. The thought made him sad.

"Are you packed?" Sherry was in the doorway, her hands on her hips, looking at Dean quizzically. "Are you okay?" She asked and he could hear the alarm in her voice.

"Yeah," Dean said. "Just get me some peroxide and some duct tape." He laughed dryly but Sherry did not smile.

She didn't get it.

Dean's boy Mack was looking at him, his face was full of fear and uncertainty. He was kneeling over the sheep, who had slit her stomach open on the jagged end of the fence. The sheep bawled, it's eyes flashing with pain, its tongue lolling from its mouth, a perfect cloud of vapor mushrooming from its cries. Mack started to run toward the house, his feet crunching in the snow.

"Where are you going?" Dean asked him, examining the sheep.

The hospital room was small and high up, giving Dean a feeling of floating above the Mile High city. Not that he cared. It

could be Calcutta for all he cared. He was sedated and watching TV. Going in and out. Jesus! Was that a man fucking a dog on TV?

Man this is some good shit!

Dean rolled his head around. He was alone. It seemed like it was very late at night. When he looked back at the TV it was turned off. Dean laughed out loud. He wished he was this high all the time. He had been sleeping, and as the dream faded like vapor from his mind he remembered where he was, Denver, and why he was there, heart.

The doctor had told Sherry that Dean's heart was only working at 20% capacity. They agreed he was to be moved to the top of the heart transplant list. Dean had laughed out loud then too. He knew he was never going to get someone else's heart. He was 60 and he was falling apart. A new heart wasn't going to make that much difference anymore. Now if they offered him a new dick, maybe.

He didn't feel that bad. Just tired. And he didn't care anymore. About anything. But no, that's not right. he did care but he didn't want to. He let go of wanting to care, but it drifting along side of him like a cheerful, colorful balloon.

Man! This was some good shit!

"Where are you going?" He asked Mack, his breath mushrooming from his mouth joining with the vapor from the braying sheep below him.

"To get the gun." Mack said, breathless, his eyes darting back from the sheep to his father. There was blood on the snow. The sheep was cut deep in the belly.

"You don't need the gun," Dean said. "Bring me a bottle of peroxide and some duct tape."

Dean turned his head and looked out the small window. It was night and it was snowing. Dean liked the snow when he didn't have to deal with it. He could relax now and enjoy this great

morphine high or whatever it was they had him on. He was flying. He watched the snow, the thick flakes drifting down through the beam of an outside light. It was beautiful and Dean felt like crying but he hadn't cried since his dad died in 1985. He wasn't sure he remembered how. But no, that's not true, He had cried. He had cried a lot since he died the first time. He cried at MASH episodes and insurance commercials. He cried when AC/DC songs came on the radio. He cried driving his motorcycle home past the old farm from work. He was ashamed at how soft he had become because of his injured heart. In his shame he cried again. Flooded with dread and fear which subsided quickly like a fast tide, he settled down into a formal kind of acceptance and watched the beautiful snow.

Mack ran into the house where Sherry was ironing shirts.

"Dad needs a bottle of peroxide and some duct tape.

Sheep cut its belly open pretty bad.."

Mack panted, his face wild and hopeful. Sherry looked out the window and could see Dean off by the fence, kneeling over something. Shaking her head, she gathered the peroxide and the duct tape and gave them to Mack.

Mack ran back to his dad in the snow. The day was clear and crisp and the snow was like a fresh coat of frosting over their small farm. Some fool drove by on the snow covered road on a motorcycle, filling the air with a harshness.

Mack reached Dean and handed him the items. Acting quick, Dean poured the entire bottle of peroxide into the wound while the sheep screamed in pain. He then stood the sheep up and began wrapping duct tape around the sheep like a saddle, binding the wound closed.

"What are you doing?" Mack asked him.

"I'm fixing him." Dean said matter of factly.

"You can't fix a sheep with duct tape!"

"Wanna bet? How much you got on you?"

Mack checked his pocket. "A Quarter."

"And you know," Mack said with tears in his eyes, holding up Dean's lucky Quarter at the funeral, "That sheep went on to have twins later that spring." Everybody in the room clapped and laughed.

Wasn't that just like Dean?

In the hospital room, Dean watched the snow and thought about the salt and pepper he had packed. He knew Sherry would find it. He wasn't allowed to have salt and pepper. Not even food interested him anymore. He rolled his lucky Quarter in his hand. He was comforted by its presence there. The snow was even more furious than before. Dean looked back at the TV. Holy Christ! Now there was a man with two dicks fucking twins!

Far out!

Man! This was some good shit all right!

